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Michael Thwaites's Wife

By
MIRIAM MICHELSON

Illustrated by C. Coles Phillips

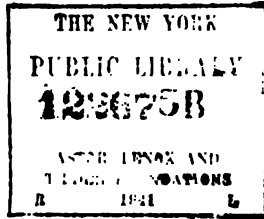


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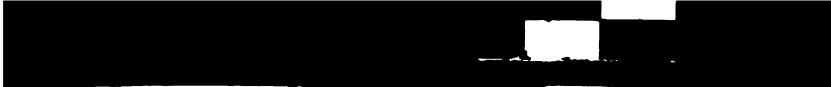




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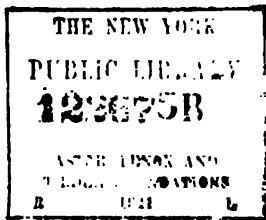
ILLUSTRATIONS

Therese and Beatrix *Double frontispiece*

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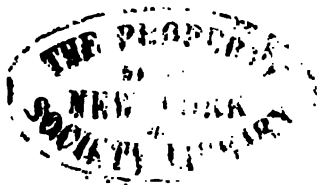
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MICHAEL THWAITES'S WIFE



Michael Thwaites's Wife

CHAPTER I

THOUGH apparently strong and still alert, Judge Thorley rarely left his rooms. The few visitors to the old place were either brought upstairs to see him, or were sent away by Mrs. Prynne, his housekeeper, with the unvarying formula, "You 'll please excuse the Judge, ma'am" (or "sir," as the case might be) "he ain't had a very good night last night."

But Judge Thorley's sleep must have been exceptionally restful about the time that young Michael Thwaites arrived; for the boy was ushered immediately up the wide, white-painted staircase, with its mahogany treads and handrail, and into the front room.

It ran the width of the house, the old Judge's sitting-room, high-ceilinged with ponderous white doors and deep, long white-sashed windows. But it was carpeted warmly, and the comparatively few pieces of furniture, though forthright and uncompromisingly Puritan, were comfortable, deep-seated, straight of line and simply upholstered; the same solid mahogany furnishing, in fact, that Colonel Thorley had placed here something more than a hundred years ago when, the war being over, he came back to Thorley, built The House—as it was called in his time — and married.

It was this Colonel Thorley who first caught Michael Thwaites's eye as he entered the room; or rather, the fine

full-length portrait of him between the two long windows that faced the visitor as he entered. It was a spirited painting of vigorous soldierly manhood; the sort of uniformed embodiment of military office that makes a lad of bone and blood stand involuntarily at attention before it, though he may never have been taught to salute.

"My grandfather, Colonel Edward Thorley — Master Michael Thwaites," said the voice of the old Judge by way of whimsical introduction; a gentleman's voice though with slightly nasal modulations, mellowed by time, deep but not sonorous, full and touched sweetly with a pleasing humour. "I hope you will like each other."

The boy started, turned quickly, looking confused and resentful for a moment; then he saw his host coming in from the adjoining bed-room, and yielded to the charm of the old gentleman's smiling eyes and shrewd, warmly coloured, clean-shaven features.

"How do you do, sir?" Michael went up to him and shook hands with the evasive grasp of fourteen. "I know I'd have liked *him* a heap."

"Boys did, I remember." The old man stretched himself comfortably in a low armchair. "There was something ridiculously youthful and everlastingly enthusiastic about him. Now that I am a model old gentleman myself, I realize that grandfather never had any dignity whatever — God bless him!"

Michael's expression was disapproving of what seemed to his youth reprehensible family criticism that might possibly expect similar unreserve from himself, and the Judge, motioning him to a chair, changed the subject.

"You 're to be a soldier, too, eh, young man?" he asked.

The boy shook his head.



"No? Why, when you were about as old as the twins are now you told me that you were going to be the greatest general in the world. What has my old friend Jasper been doing to you? Coercing you into becoming a solemn old saw-bones like himself?"

Michael's black brows knitted and for a moment his lips shut tight. But he evidently changed his mind and decided to respond to the bantering personal question that displeased him.

"Father has n't done anything," he said shortly.

"Ah, then, *you* have changed. Boys do," smiled the Judge.

"I don't," said the boy challengingly, and he shook his shaggy head. "It's my — eyes," he added in a lower tone that was more expressively vituperative than the qualifying word inferable from the temper of the short pause.

The old man looked over at him a minute. He was interested, and children — outside of his little twin granddaughters, who were psychological studies to him — did not interest him ordinarily.

"I did not understand from Jasper's letter that it was so bad as that," he said.

"They ain't bad," the boy returned grudgingly. "They're only bad enough to prevent my getting into West Point when I'm ready, and to — to threaten to get worse if I do what I want to, and to make things — beastly — generally."

"Ah, I see." The Judge nodded sympathetically. "Let us hope the country and out of doors up here at Thorley will help them, as your father anticipates. You're to make yourself at home, my lad; Jasper and I were close friends already at your age and I am happy to have his son become

a member of my household. It is not a very lively place for a boy of fourteen; this floor is mine, and you can imagine it is rather quiet; the top floor is the children's and Mrs. Prynne's. . . But the middle one shall be your own to do as you please with and you will soon have friends of your own age to spend some time with you. Perhaps you 'd like to go up and look at your rooms."

He dismissed the boy with a nod when the house-keeper came; a sturdy New England woman she was, with graying red-brown hair, a wholesome freckled face, and a tall, vigorous figure whose strength, it seemed, could only increase with age.

As Michael climbed the stairs and reached the landing, the light figure of a little girl shot across the hall, eyed him like a bird just about to take wing, and vanished; and when he got to the next story and stood hesitating a moment, as one does in a strange house, the same light little figure danced across his vision and was out of sight in a second.

The boy frowned; normally, these fairy-like little twins would have piqued him into appraising similarities and detecting differences. But the new perception of disability which had been growing in him ever since the oculist had defined his trouble, made him shrink sensitively from having the defective sense challenged. Though as yet unaware what it was that influenced him in this respect, his eyes had begun to demand clearness of outline, distinctness, and tangible, easy differences, and preferably features printed in large, simple characters. Thought of these twin elves—for he soon knew he had seen two, however alike—disturbed and displeased him.

Yet, when he was summoned to the nursery for luncheon, and Mrs. Prynne came forward to greet him, with a small

figure in white on either side of her, the boy felt a sense of relief; they looked so unlike.

"The Judge asked me to present his excuses to you, Mr. Michael," said the housekeeper. "He never eats lunch, but he hopes you will dine with him this evening. Shall we sit down? Girlies, this is Mr. Michael Thwaites, who's come to live with us for awhile. These are the twins, Mr. Michael, Therese and Beatrix."

Four shy, gold-gray eyes looked up for a second appraisingly and two tiny hands were held out to him; and to young Michael, sore with resentment at fate and strange with shyness himself, there came a swift sense of relief, the first throwing off of constraint since he had been torn up by the doctor's orders and transplanted.

"You don't have such long names as that for everybody, do you, sissies?" he asked cheerily as, in the intimacy of the little dining-room they sat about the round table. "Mine's Mike — say it, won't you? It's easy."

The child on the housekeeper's left looked up at him shyly; her lips parted as though for speech, then closed and timidly she lifted a little shoulder between Michael and herself and leaned her head on Mrs. Prynne's arm. But the child on the right leaned forward, her eager, little listening face alight.

"Mike," she said slowly with the gravity of effort. "Mike!" And suddenly she laughed out. It was as though a bird had been moved to mirth by some secret absurdity in flower or tree.

Michael laughed too, a short, boyish chuckle that was so strange in that house both little girls opened round eyes and sat speechless to listen, staring at him; and in that moment, now that their faces expressed the same feeling, they were exactly alike.

"We call 'em Tess and Trixy," said the housekeeper, staidly helping the child from whose shoulders, wrists, and waist bright ribbons fluttered, while a maid attended the other.

"Fine!" said the boy; he ate hungrily, his youthful pessimism yielding lightly to appetite. "Trixy suits her."

"Yes," said Mrs. Prynne, "but this one's name is —" She stopped, for the child, springing to her feet, had laid a warning finger on the housekeeper's lips.

"I *am* Twixy," she said defiantly. "I am — to-day. I told my grandfather early this morning. So all — all to-day I'm Twixy."

"Very well; very well!" said the housekeeper impatiently. "Sit down and eat your lunch nicely. . . A body can't keep remembering all their plays and nonsense, Mr. Michael," she went on. "They're the busiest feather-heads."

"Not me — to-day," put in the other little girl. "I'm not featherhead when I'm Tessy. She's featherhead 'cause she's Trix." She waved her spoon explanatorily toward her sister.

"Well — well!" agreed Mrs. Prynne. "Your father, the great doctor, is very well, Mr. Michael?"

"Yes, thank you," said Michael stuffing manfully.

"And your mother? Still writing and speeching and addressing audiences?" she continued.

"Yes." Michael's voice was gruff.

In Mrs. Laura Whitaker Thwaites's talented onward path toward liberty and equality, admirers and converts sprang up, her husband among them; but behind her, in the very citadel whence she had triumphantly issued, an uncompromising, unreasoning, unreconcilable sex-foe dwelt — her fourteen-year-old son.

But the change in the boy's tone was lost upon Mrs. Pryne, for the child who called herself Trixy was pushing away her plate angrily, while she sobbed and remonstrated at the same time.

"Oh, deary me! These Trixy-days of yours, Tess, will be the death of me!" ejaculated the housekeeper.

"Not Tess!" cried the little one, her baby eyes blazing. "I'm Twix to-day and Twixy never — never — never dwinks milk!"

"Oh!" Mrs. Pryne's exclamation was of enlightenment and impatience. "Take away the milk, Molly," she said to the maid, "and give her cocoa. We'll have an awful time to-day; try to remember it's one of those terrible Trixy days we must pray to be delivered from. . . You see, Mr. Michael, it's this way," she explained as the maid made the change and the child was appeased, "they have an absurd way now and then of changing names; but as I've told the Judge, if names was all they'd change, I would n't complain. But do you suppose just to call herself Trix will suit this perverse child? Not a bit of it. She's got to *be* Trix; she's got to ape every bit of badness Trix is up to and, being a wicked little mimic, she must add her own tantrums to it, so that it's as much as your life's worth to miscall her. Oh, it keeps a body's hands full and the Judge only laughs and says big words about it. But let me tell you 'tain't what he calls something about interchangeable identity, it's badness; that's what it is. I'd cure it!"

Michael looked curiously at the little pretender; there was no mistaking the wrath that agitated that baby face. "My!" he said, "ain't she a bad little thing?"

"No, Tessy ain't bad," said the disguised Trix. "Tessy's

the good one. That's why I'm good to-day," she added soberly, "'cause I'm Tessy to-day, and Tessy's the good one."

The boy looked bewildered.

"Yes — yes," Mrs. Prynne agreed with a sigh of relief. "One blessing is that *you're* really good, for part of the time anyway, on these Trixy days, honey."

"But I say!" Young Thwaites stopped eating, so interested he had become. "What a funny idea, is n't it? Do they often do it?"

"Don't!" cried the pseudo-Trixy sharply. "Don't talk it!"

"Won't you even let us talk about you — eh?" Michael demanded, leaning toward her.

But she shrank from him peevishly, like a spoiled little thing.

"Oh, well," the boy turned readily to the dish of sweets before him, "I guess 'tain't good manners anyway." He looked up, his mouth full of cream, his sombre eyes smiling over at her, and she watched him pouting, but alert and curious as a squirrel. "'Tain't good manners," he repeated and added, "is it — Trixy?"

She beamed at him then. His use of the name she had chosen for hers, though temporarily, delighted the small actress; recognition of her rôle was all of stage setting she needed. "Mike — Mike!" she cried and she waved her spoon toward him caressingly as she stood, half dancing in her chair.

But suddenly her gay face clouded. "What you eatin'?" she demanded of her sister.

The other little one put both hands over her plate, and hurriedly and vainly Mrs. Prynne sought to intercede.

"You eatin' pears and Tessy never — never eats pears. Stop it!" The temporary Trixy was almost upon the table now, as peremptorily she stamped her foot and glared upon her recalcitrant twin.

But that twin was only a temporary Tessy, and not nearly so faithful an impersonator as the real one. "I won't," she said distinctly, in spite of the mouthful she took now deliberately. "I just won't. I like pears."

"But Tessy don't. They make her sick. You 're Tessy — you 'll make her sick!" cried the child, becoming frantic as though from an intolerable sense of wrong.

"Now, we 're in for it," remarked Mrs. Prynne to the world at large. "Molly, take away the pears."

But, with the best intentions, Molly could n't; for the Tessy-for-a-day held tightly to hers and promised to be dragged from her chair before she would part with it.

"Mercy on us! It 'll end in two Trixys, and that 's more 'n anybody can stand," exclaimed Mrs. Prynne, throwing herself in her perplexity upon the magnanimity of the aggressor. "Listen, girlie," she coaxed, "be Mammy Prynne's good one, as you always are except on Trixy days. Be mammy's sweetheart and let her have the pear."

The tears were rolling down the child's anguished face as she watched her twin hastily bolting the threatened delicacy. "I can't," she cried. "I can't! I 'm Twix. She 's making Tessy sick and — and she — won't — play fair!" And burying her face in her outstretched hands, as she threw herself over the table, she wept as though her small heart was breaking. And presently her twin was sobbing, too.

"You 'll please excuse me, sir." Mrs. Prynne gathered one twin under her arm while the maid took the other. "It 's

unlucky you should have seen 'em first to-day," she added and disappeared, the children's cries diminishing as they were borne farther and farther away and doors hastily shut behind them.

Michael, left alone at the table, finished his lunch; it was a very good lunch with an ample supply of the sweets his boy's stomach coveted. Then he strolled outdoors on a voyage of discovery.

Thorley is a sunny little village, not suburban enough to share metropolitan graces and discomforts; not far enough away from the great community to retain its wildness, but still simple in its quasi-natural loveliness, and apt to break into mighty trees on even the principal street and close stretches of lawn, which might have been the carpet of the woods long ago. There are oaks on the old Thorley place which once spread their branches over rebellious heads that have since been pictured in the idealized repose of the Revolution's heroes; there is a hillside of birches rising from the stream's edge where violets riot in spring and quaker ladies and daffodils; there are warm, sunny nooks lined deep with rustling leaves; there is a sharp hill behind the house from whose summit in winter, when the intervening woods have been stripped, one can catch a glimpse of the frozen pond gleaming under the red sun like a mirror of steel.

Michael Thwaites went over the place that afternoon; not all of it, but much of it. He saw the pond and said "skates." He noted the stream and wondered when he might need his rod. He spied the steep hill and he thought "skis — perhaps; sleds anyway." He followed the broad road that, coming up from the village, winds through the wood and enters The House grounds, and he could almost feel himself

upon his mare Sara's back. He was not an unimpressionable boy, but the beauty of Nature had not yet revealed itself to him; the trouble with his eyes, had he known it, had much to do with this. But he did not miss what he had never had, and — next to the effect his infirmity had had upon his plans for a soldier's life — he ranked with bitterness the handicap it was athletically. For he was a passionate athlete, this rugged, black-headed boy; he had a body that was flawlessly strong and sinewy, a set of muscles that never had failed till his eyes played him false. But eyes or no eyes, he said to himself, as he turned back in the golden dusk of the summer evening, he should ride and swim and skate and fly on skis and spend long, long days in the open. If this cured his eyes, as the oculist had promised, so much the better; if not, why Ned Winslow and the rest, his little coterie of comrades, would outstrip him and he must make the best of it. Perhaps — it was his thought as he stood before the big, broad old house and the charm of the place grew upon him — it would not be so hard, in a place like Thorley.

He hurried up the stairs two at a bound, to dress for dinner; he had that glorified consciousness of physical self that is youth's birthright. He whistled to himself as he dressed, and when he stepped outside his door in the exaggerated trimness of the well-bred, well-groomed child-gentleman, he was a fine, rugged young animal to look upon.

But an irresistible sound of bubbling laughter came from the floor above; it called to the child in him and he ran up the half-flight of low, wide stairs to get a glimpse of its source. It was the day's Trixy, who was caracoling gaily around an imaginary circus ring for the edification of her delighted sister and Mrs. Prynne and Molly. The augmentation of her audience — for she saw Michael imme-

diately — acted upon the little thing as a heady stimulant; her dancing feet beat a high-stepping rhythm, while with proud carriage and well-lifted head she pursued her equine career. As she passed him, Michael seized the fluttering end of her sash and, cracking his fingers for the imaginary riding-master's whip, took his part in the play. The little thing's eyes flashed with the exquisite delight of being artistically comprehended, but she did not for an instant drop her make-believe; a pretense of being curbed, an affectation of spirited chafing against the reins, a swifter, more resolute and even pace — these were all the notice she deigned of sharing the stage with another.

But it took a very trivial thing to shatter the whole illusion. The other little girl, attracted by the unusual element in the game, ran from the room and returning with a long, many-coloured sash, slipped it about her waist and, placing the ends in Michael's hands, started with gay prancing to convert the single team into a tandem.

But her sister stopped short and, dropping her rôle, turned indignantly upon her. "You've got Twixy's sash on," she said. "Take it off."

"No. I want to play, too," protested her twin.

"But you can't wear Twixy's sash to-day." The child's vibrating voice had in it a tense sense of outrage so strong that, despite her tyranny, Michael found himself listening sympathetically.

Mrs. Prynne hurried to the rescue. "You see, dearie," she argued with the pretended Trix, "how it always happens, this foolish game. It always ends in two Trixys."

"No!" cried the child sharply.

"Yes, it does. You're both bad and there's no good one at all."

"No, — no!" she protested, throwing herself upon Mrs. Prynne's bosom. "'Cause where is Tessy then? There must be a Tessy — must be — must be!"

"Come — play," urged her sister, turning upon the boy a glowing, excited face.

But a curious sympathy for the other self-torturing little despot held Michael. "Come, Trixy," he coaxed, taking the end of her sash again, "let 's all play. It will be fine to have twin ponies."

But she tore the ribbons from his hand and with quick, passionate gestures she stripped them from her and threw them on the floor. Feverishly her little hand plucked at shoulders and wrist and hair till the gay bows fell fluttering from her like so many wounded butterflies. She stood for a second, before the tempestuous tears came, her glowing, incredulous eyes fixed upon her twin as though the latter were guilty of infamy too terrible for words.

"And that 's the good one!" Mrs. Prynne remarked with ironical resignation.

At the words the child's nervous tension gave way; she fell sobbing to the floor. In vain Mrs. Prynne strove to lift and comfort her; in vain Michael called her by the name she had chosen; in vain even the real Trixy, penitent now and suffering, threw herself beside her, imploring her to be Trix again and, with an arm about the little struggling panting body, promised faithful adherence to compact.

"No, no, I won't — I won't be Twixy no more — never, no more," wailed the child. "You ain't good to Tessy. You take her an' 'en you change and you 're Twixy an' I 'm Twixy an' no — no place in *all* the world is any Tessy — at — all! I 'll never be — Twixy — again!" And she wept

as though mourning the passing of something infinitely dear to her.

“Thank goodness for that!” Mrs. Prynne held up grateful hands. “We ’ll have no more Trixy days. . . . Come, sweetheart, come, Mammy Prynne’s Tessy!” She lifted the sobbing child. “It’s baby’s bed-time, Mr. Michael,” she said to him over her shoulder as she bore her charge away. “I only hope she don’t have the usual nightmare of a world without any T-e-s-s-y,” she spelled the name guardedly. “But she ’ll be all right in the morning, won’t you, my lamb? Good-night, Mr. Michael, Judge Thorley will be waiting for you.”



CHAPTER II

THE correctly attired host who greeted Michael that evening was quite a different personage from the slippered old gentleman of the morning. Like an antiquated belle, who doffs her years when she dons full dress in response to the festive suggestion of late hours and artificial light, Judge Peter Thorley grew younger as the day grew older.

He loved the serenity of lamplight, and he kept that serenity untroubled. In the day-time he met such every-day problems as beset living, however simple, and disposed of them with something of that clear good sense and practical philosophy which had distinguished him on the bench. But what was simple of comprehension and disposition by day became irritating and complex to the old man by night. Systematically, therefore, he set a term for the consideration of household and family affairs; that term closed promptly at sunset, when he resolutely gave himself up to bodily comfort and peace of mind.

Evening was the time for discussion, Judge Thorley held; not argumentative, impassioned controversy, but that easy, ambling conversational gait that may turn up almost any inviting lane of thought. It was a sort of gentle, sane dreaming aloud, evidenced in a quietly contemplative discursiveness, in a disposition to consider possibilities and even improbabilities, social, political, and scientific, with good-natured tolerance and a serenely optimistic belief in an ultimately satisfactory decision.

The fulfilment of such a mood, of course, requires companionship, and the old Judge had found and fostered for years a most congenial friend in Major Matthewson, a meek, sweet, saintly agnostic, who permitted the world to think as it would on any subject under the sun, except the one upon which Matthewson had made up his mind that one could not make up one's mind.

This gentleman, short and heavily built, sat opposite his host at table. Across from Michael was Major Matthewson's son, a blonde boy some years Michael's junior.

"You two young men must get to be capital friends," said the Judge glancing from one to the other. "Master Thwaites's residence among us means a possible companionship of years for you. I'd advise you to make the most of it, as Matthewson and I have done."

The two boys, affecting to be busy with very large table-napkins, eyed each other warily. "He's too pretty," said Michael to himself. "He shan't boss me," was the other's instinctive protest against the strength and pugnacity in the new boy's face.

"Doubtless," Major Matthewson remarked in a mild, smooth voice, his babyish blue eyes twinkling, "there will be preliminaries to be settled, boys. You'll have to teach your friend, Mr. Michael, to respect the sanctity of eventide and to avoid all possible jars thereto."

"And you, Dick," the Judge put in with a chuckle, "must see that it is clearly understood no trifling will be permitted with that keystone of all free and radical thought, irreligiosity."

"After that," continued Matthewson, "things should go pretty smoothly, if you let your friend do most of the talking."

"Out of regard, perhaps, to the fact that he has not so

many years ahead of him as you have in which to say things," added the old Judge suavely. And the two men lifted their glasses and drank to each other with that cordial self-knowledge and understanding that comes with long, close friendship.

"I suspect though, Dick," — Matthewson turned to his son, and his voice struck a note that brought home to Michael possibilities in the relationship of father and son which had not been sounded in his own experience — "you'll have much to forgive young Thwaites; he's stronger than you, my man."

"Yes, he is that." Dick flushed with the quick and quickly receding blush of the very fair skinned. "I guess you're stronger than most fellows, are n't you, Thwaites?"

"Perhaps," said Michael. After all there was something appealing, something winning even in that fair boy opposite who had so determinedly made the first advance, and something uncommon in his dark blue eyes, too spirited and glowing for mere prettiness. There must have been, for Michael found himself adding: "But my beastly eyes make up for it." And then he regretted his unusual lack of reserve and scowled blackly.

But young Matthewson, with boyhood's instinctive avoidance of the pathological, said with quick, shame-faced sympathy: "Oh, they'll be all right here, don't you think?" and plunged into conversation.

It was easy after that. While the gentlemen's talk flowed on in its accustomed channel over the boys' heads, these two shot back and forth swift question and answer. The mainstream above was freighted with the immaterial, the ideal, the improbably possible. In his old age, theories out of the ordinary and uncommon incidents fascinated Judge

Thorley. All his active life had been passed in rigid devotion to facts; the fanciful now charmed him, and his amiable companion drifted with him, while the boys exchanged laconic confidences about mythical trout that had been caught above Haddon Rock; as to the chances of an early winter and good skating; what hope a stranger might have of continuing his studies in the local schools; what outlook for companionship the neighbourhood held out; whether there really were deer still in the woods north of Big Peak — all that store of material interests that makes up a boy's limited, vital outlook on life.

As the dinner proceeded, Michael Thwaites found himself thawing; young Matthewson, flushing from mere eagerness to question, to answer, became less of a pretty boy and promised more of good-fellowship. A boarding-school lad nearly all of his boy-life, Michael became conscious now for the first time of how a community may supplement and enrich a youth's experience; it dawned upon his youthful dogmatic self that this Dick Matthewson, living with mother, father, and sister, and at home in half a dozen other houses of the country-side, was a happier, fuller nature than the boys who, like himself, had become baby collegiates as soon as they were old enough to be sent from home. It amused him and excited his curiosity to hear the names of girls on his new friend's lips; for the monastic atmosphere in which his years had passed had created a sex-consciousness in himself which he tried to conceal behind gruffness.

"Who's Anne?" he asked with a scowl, when Dick repeated that name in telling of some happening. "She's not your sister, too, is she?"

"Oh, no. Grace is the only sister I've got," said Dick with a smile in his fine eyes. "And Grace is — well, she's

like other girls. But Anne's different. You'd like to know Anne Gregory; she's just crazy about your mother."

"Oh, is she? Well—I don't want to know her." Michael's scowl was not in the least pretense now, and it shocked Dick into silence.

As Michael, too, went silently on with his dinner, a comprehension of what significance his words might carry to this young stranger vexed him with himself. But Michael Thwaites could not tolerate the girls who inquired in a breathlessly adoring voice about his mother; it argued in themselves qualities with which he was entirely uncongenial. A boy with crude, stiffly conventional ideas, whose mother's name stood at the head of the list of emancipated and militant feminist champions, he had developed an almost savagely sensitive reticence about family affairs. At school, Michael had picked up the gage whenever the challenge of Woman's Rights had been flung down before him. The conventional male, he had punched (and been punched) at the slightest insinuation against the womanliness of the female whose blood-champion he must be. Yet, however victorious he was because of his compact, heavy-set body and strong fists, he quit every field of battle a loser, for in his heart he believed his cause unworthy. He fought for Laura Whitaker Thwaites who, though legitimately a wife and mother, had never accepted her husband's name nor made a home for her child; but the strong masculinity of his nature condemned her. Yet he had never revealed as much as had slipped from him to-night, when he figured this girl, Anne Gregory, to himself as a disciple of his mother, and so to be avoided by one who believed he had had sufficient experience of emancipated womanhood.

So Michael bent over his plate, and opposite him Dick

sat thinking of his own big-hearted, hearty-voiced mother, wondering what sin she could commit that might merit her son's disapproval, and stealing a glance now and then at the big, black-haired boy across the table who pretended, in his embarrassment, to have found much to interest him in the conversation that was going on in the higher stratum. But the assumption of interest soon became real. Judge Thorley had mounted his hobby, as he usually did over the coffee and cigars, when the table was cleared and the servants dismissed.

"I tell you, Matthewson," he was saying, as he had said often before to his gracious listener, "the subject is fascinating, and no one has a better opportunity to study it than myself. When my son Ned's wife gave birth to twins I was humiliated; if I had known, as I do now, that multiple births are frequent in Ferrall's wife's family, Ned should never have married poor Therese. But"—The Judge drained another cup of coffee from the old brass urn and passed it to his friend—"though I contend that plural births are a mark of reversion, I've become so interested in the psychological aspect of the problem that if poor Ned had n't married Therese Ferrall he would have robbed his father of occupation in his old age!"

"But seriously, my dear Judge," began his friend.

"Seriously," Judge Thorley did not propose to permit anyone but himself speech upon his favourite topic, "Ned was a dear fellow, a good son and an amiable husband; and Therese was a dear, good girl and a sweet wife. But they were both a couple of conventional beings—mere breeders, I may say. Now Beatrix, Ned's sister-in-law, or rather, half-sister-in-law, was the one I would have chosen for him."

"Not Mrs. Rodd!" exclaimed Matthewson.

"Yes, Mrs. Rodd. A woman of spirit, that. She had three husbands, had n't she? and lived her own life with each one of them. Beatty she divorced, Hilliston died, and Rodd, who had neither the brains of the first nor the breeding of the second, outlived her. A gay, busy, adventurous woman, that — a woman whom things happen to. Eccentric? Of course. But you would n't have caught Beatrix Rodd having twins, Matthewson."

"I suppose not," laughed Matthewson, "seeing that she and Therese had different mothers, and to bear twins is the peculiar sin, according to you, of the family of Ferrall's first wife. . . . Poor Beatrix! A baby might have steadied her."

"Not a bit of it. There was one, you know, that died young. But during its lifetime Mrs. Rodd was the same unaccountable, free and untrammelled Beatrix she was when a girl. Her baby was only a couple of months old and dependent on her for nourishment, when she left him, got on the train one morning, and came to Thorley for a visit."

"How could she be so heartless!"

"No — really, not heartless, merely impulsive. She had forgotten all about the tri-hourly feeding, or whatever it was. The thing that recalled it to her was that feeling of bursting fulness in her breasts that gives to a mother-cow's low its pathetic, suffering note. What was Beatrix to do? It came to her in a minute, and I'd take my oath no other woman would ever have thought of it — particularly since she and Therese had had one of their many quarrels. (The half-sisters loved each other dearly, you know, and quarrelled as often and as heartily as though the relationship had been closer.) But about Beatrix Ferrall-Beatty-Hilliston-Rodd in lacteal distress! She jumps into a carriage and drives

up to our door at a breakneck pace. (Therese was out; poor girl, it was the last time she went out.) She flies up the nursery stairs, catches up one of the twins, and nurses her niece from the full breasts for which her own baby was probably howling at that minute, and then, relieved, retraces her steps as quickly, and drives triumphantly off to meet her engagement."

"Upon my word!" gasped Major Matthewson.

"How's that for a woman of resource?" chuckled the Judge. "You should hear Mammy Prynne tell the story. You know she was my daughter-in-law's nurse when old Ferrall married the second time, and she knew Beatrix from her turbulent babyhood up. Do you know, Matthewson, you just can't talk it out of Mrs. Prynne, who is a fairly intelligent woman, that our baby did not drink in turbulence and tribulation with her Aunt Beatrix's milk."

"Which one was it she nursed — Trixy?"

"That's the point." Judge Thorley laughed enjoyingly. "Alas for Mrs. Prynne's theory, she does n't know as a matter of fact which one of the twins drank of that font of depravity. She's only positive, as a matter of faith, that it was Trix. She was so excited and she so excited Therese in the telling of it, when she got back, that it was impossible to find out. Now, for my part, I know 'twas Tessy who drank in sense and spirit from Beatrix Rodd — if it was anything more than another mother's milk she got."

"I'd suggest to you both to re-read your Spencer," said Matthewson with a smile. "Everything is predetermined, you know, in each individual by the character of nerve tissue and its arrangement and complexity. Education and other influences can only stimulate the preëxisting."

Judge Thorley pulled his long, thin nose reflectively; his

was that enviable calibre of mind which finds but discord in the overtones of science when they oppose its theories, and which treats as inspired harmonies all those that further them. "Humph!" he said. "I covered that with my cautious 'if'. One is doubtless buried in his children — who said it? The thought, of course, is Darwinian. Sometimes one even lives to see himself resurrected in them — as I seem to see a finer feminine self and something of my mother, too, in my granddaughter Tess. But oftener one's sentiments, his feelings, his tastes lie dormant (to be reborn perhaps in some later child) in that great sepulcher, a living human being, who holds in himself all that went before. And there are scientific temperaments that can conceive in the individual so nice a balancing of hereditary traits that a very small thing — like being nursed by an Aunt Beatrix, for instance," he parenthesized with a chuckle, "may upset the whole mighty structure and start free and clanging a new set of instincts with utterly different traits and tendencies. . . . It's like Mrs. Prynne — good soul — to seize upon this incident to excuse little Trix's naughtiness. But the more thoughtful of us must not reject the simple scientific solution of the child's lack of conscience."

"Which is?" questioned Matthewson.

"Now listen, Matthewson," said the old man, not at all antagonized by his friend's obviously cynical attitude. "We've gone over it before, but what do you make of the fact that primitive peoples are horrified at multiple human births? A Japanese princess, Hearn writes about, went insane from shame at having given birth to twins. I can understand that. Great fertility is so obviously Nature's compensation to lower organisms; a sort of making over-

payment in quantity for lack of quality. Read your own Spencer, if you don't believe me and the construction I put upon it. The lower the organism, we all know, the higher the reproductive power. A million eggs, Carpenter tells you, are produced at once by a single codfish; in the strong and sagacious shark few are found. During its centuries of existence an oak does not develop as many acorns as a fungus does spores in a single night."

"Well, well," demanded his friend restively, "what does that prove except that if Trix's soul capacity be cut in two, Tessy's is likewise?"

"Pardon me!" said the Judge decidedly. "Wait a minute. Now," he leaned forward argumentatively, checking his points upon the fingers of a long, lean old hand, "look higher up in the scale of life to where births, though multiple, are not multitudinous, and you can note differences — not always bodily, but invariably in intelligence. What litter but has its over-average member — and consequently its under-average members? The one determines the other, in multiparity. And what more probable than that in the highest type it is the highest quality which will be lacking in one, if over-abundant in the other?"

"Ah!" exclaimed his friend, "if it *is* over-abundant in the other."

"Of that, Matthewson," Judge Thorley's tone was gravely didactic, "there can be no doubt. I am the best judge of that."

"And," continued his undismayed antagonist, "if I grant that much, but insist that it is Trixy, and not Tess, who proves it, Trixy who is over-souled?"

"Then," remarked the old Judge courteously, "you show a very kindly regard for the little creature but a non-

acquaintance with facts; or," with a twinkle in his old eyes he added, "a disposition to misinterpret, in order to uphold what I sympathetically admit is a very weak side of our argument."

Major Matthewson sniffed indignantly, but his delighted opponent went calmly on. "Biologists insist, you know, that there's an inverse relationship between the nervous and reproductive systems. And!" An exclamative conjunction was one of Judge Thorley's methods of gathering up his facts and with them his listener's attention. "And from a protozoön up, the oftener it divides (and reproduction is division) the smaller will be the development of its single-celled individuality — soul, in short. Since the fertility of animals varies as the weight ratio of brain to body (the greater disproportion, the greater fecundity) it is evident that multiparous human mothers have not soul enough (call it nervous system, if you will) for their offspring. They can't have; it is scientifically impossible. You must see that, Matthewson?"

"Not a bit of it," said Matthewson sturdily. "The soul-characteristic is masculine, if soul be nervous system; nutrition is all that Nature expects of the female. Poor Therese certainly fulfilled her part there; the soul, then, came from Ned."

"Well, if it did, he had but one to give," declared the old man promptly, "and Tessy got it."

"Peter Thorley," said Matthewson solemnly, as though hesitating at the enormity of such an accusation, "I suspect you still conceive of soul as extra-material."

But Judge Thorley waived argument on that subject. "Be that as it may," he said punctiliously, "you will admit that there are grades of soul as well as variations in bodily

strength. All the more if soul-strength is material is ~~it~~ subject to the law of struggle for existence."

"A cruel theory," growled Mathewson softly, "that ~~has~~ nothing to do with souls for babies."

"It has this to do with it: if there was but one soul for the two, Tessy has it; if there were two, she has one plus."

"Little pig!" commented Matthewson, unscientifically.

Judge Thorley laughed. "If you choose," he said. "Altruism comes a long way after the struggle for existence, but it comes. Baby as she is, Tessy would give her life now for her sister; I really believe she would. In the inchoate beginning of their individualities she must have encroached upon her twin — since encroachment is the law of the embryo — as surely as a fitter amoeba takes what it can from a weaker one. It follows, therefrom, that the weaker human twin is either a contentedly incomplete being, and so innocuous; or fatally, though obscurely, conscious of a lack, a deprivation of entity, to attain which it struggles vainly, blindly. She can be neither moral nor immoral, as she lacks an essential part that would balance her nature, round it out. From her I look for curiosities of depravity, so-called —"

"Good Heavens!" ejaculated Matthewson.

"And," resumed the Judge calmly, "from the stronger twin I expect unpractical heights of virtue and self-abnegation. Naturally, for the divorce of temperament into two individuals must produce some such irregular result, while a blending and consequent comparative negation of qualities is what would have occurred had the two individuals been one normal creature."

Matthewson shook his head. "It seems to me," he said, "that the kindest as well as the most scientific interpretation

is that the two are really to be judged as one; their virtues and defects averaged, as it were. You remember the case Galton quotes of twin brothers who were complementary, so to speak, in ability and disposition. One of them was poetic and literary, the other being practical, mathematic, and linguistic. Between them, as they themselves said, they made up a very decent sort of man.

"My dear Matthewson," Judge Thorley said, with grave and ostentatious patience, "if you really knew my granddaughter you would admit that such a solution cannot explain the psychological value of Tessy. Besides, if you will carefully look up the case you quote, you will be convinced, I am almost certain, that the brothers you mention were ordinary fraternal, not duplicate twins; there's strong corroboration in the fact that they were extremely unlike physically."

"I thought," remarked Matthewson enjoyingly, "that you particularly detested anybody who was so unobserving as to take one of your little girls for the other. Mrs. Prynne herself says she never knows when a wretched maid is to be discharged for this heinous crime."

"Likeness is a thing of expression — not of features," retorted the old man. "Trixy could not unconsciously look like Tess; she might try to affect Tessy's disposition and, if she succeeded even temporarily, come to an approximate likeness of her. I grant you there is a sort of interchangeable likeness in expression that occasionally gives to each the effect of being more like her sister than herself. But that is a mere fluctuation of forming temperament; not a definite and positive resemblance. As to maids," he added with a chuckle, "an unobservant servant is a very poor one, and should be dispensed with on general

principles. . . . Don't you think so, young man?" he asked, turning suddenly to Michael, as the boy's frowning attention was forced upon him.

Michael started; he had followed the argument as well as he could, drowning in technicalities at times, but apparently catching the drift of the conversation and listening with an eager intentness that piqued and puzzled Dick Matthewson, whose practical mind had no patience with the vagaries of his elders.

"But to-day," Michael cried, "the one you called Trix was the good one; not Tess."

"Trix? No, you've got them mixed," said the Judge, while the elder Matthewson glanced sharply at the two boys; he had been so sure of their inattention that he felt now a twinge of parental concern as to what might have been said in their presence.

"No, it was Trix," repeated Michael. "Mrs. Prynne said Tessy was playing she was her sister to-day."

"Ah — yes," mused the Judge.

"Ah, yes, indeed!" exclaimed Matthewson, returning to the charge. "How does your theory account for your little saint Tessy's coveting Trix's identity and the piratical reputation with which you've endowed her? Tell me that, Peter Thorley. If Trix has no soul, what tempts Tessy to exchange hers even temporarily for a blank? And why does Tessy the one day she is Trix seem more of a human being than all the saintly, sweet days put together when she is herself?"

"I can't tell you that, for I don't believe it." The Judge leaned over, and his long delicate fingers were laid earnestly on his friend's arm. "It is the brute strength of perversity, Matthewson, that you confound with individuality. But

how can an intelligent man confuse amenability, reason, good sense, with inanity? In the little you have seen of Tess, you've noticed merely that she is a well-bred, well-behaved child; and you leap to the conclusion that she is nothing more. Now, there is where you are all wrong. Apart from this aberration that changes her for a day into a tempestuous little non-morality like Trix, Tessy is sweet, lovable, gentle; so is the average little girl. But there are depths of feeling in my granddaughter, a capacity for emotion, a power to endure, that are rare. Let me give you an instance. A full year ago ——

"Not to-night." Matthewson held up a warding hand as he rose from the table. "It's time Dick and I were on our way home. And my mind is full of that poor orphan baby of a Trix," he said softly. "To have a theorist for a grandfather, a superstitious old body for a nurse, and no simple, normal woman about to laugh at her naughtiness, and discipline and belittle it as it deserves!

'For I was wayward, bold and wild,
A self-willed imp, a grandam's child' "

he quoted in his genial voice. "I warn you, Peter Thorley, that between you and Mrs. Prynne you'll confirm Trix's baby notion that she's a lost soul (instead of a no-soul) of whom nothing but badness can be expected. She will grow up with it and act up to it, too, I'm afraid. I don't believe much in all the scientific nonsense you've quoted, and I know less; but if there's anything in suggestion, Beatrix Thorley ought to give you enough trouble to keep you in hot water and — confidentially — you'll have deserved it. . . . Now, then, it's boy's bed-time. Don't let Judge Thorley keep you out of bed, youngster, talking

psychological fol-de-rol," he added, turning kindly to Michael. "Long sleeps my wife recommends for young people whose eyes trouble them, and whose eyes don't! And she's wiser than most doctors — I say it with respect. Good-night, my boy; come over to see Dick right away and make yourself at home with us."

"Thank you, sir." Michael shook hands.

He felt an obscure sense of comradeship with the elder Matthewson, as with one who played on his side of the game. His farewell to Dick was short, so preoccupied he was with the thought stirred up in his mind by the argument of the two gentlemen. He had noted — and it had roused him to perverse partisanship, as is the gallant habit of youth — the Judge's fond emphasis and use of the word granddaughter in the singular.

"It seemed to me," he said brusquely resuming the subject as he stood for a moment with his host at the foot of the stairs after the others had gone, "that she was just greedy to be her sister, that Tessy was; that's the way it seemed to me."

"Ah — indeed?" The Judge looked critically down upon the boy's dark, pugnacious face. "My granddaughter is never greedy. That same scientific man you heard Mr. Matthewson quote speaks of a case of interchangeable identity in twins," he went on serenely unconscious of his listener's lack of comprehension, "a similar temporary inversion of character, though involuntary. There are other twins on record as having run into each other's characters, as it were. Tessy will outgrow it. Good-night, my lad; a restful sleep to Jasper Thwaites's son in his new bed."

"Thank you, Judge Thorley," said Michael stiffly, but he

could not leave the subject that so interested him. "Tessy did say to-night that she'd never change with her sister again; but that was when she was crying with rage against Trixy. I suppose she'll forget all about her promise when she's ready to change again. Good-night."

But the old man laid a detaining hand upon the boy as he turned to hurry up the stairs.

"You suppose quite wrongly, my lad," he said coldly. "My granddaughter never makes a promise to break nor forgets one."

"Oh!" exclaimed Michael quickly, "I did n't mean ——"

"No, of course not," interrupted his host genially. "Good-night."

But resentment accompanied Michael up the stairs. A reticent boy and a somewhat distrustful one, he rarely laid himself liable to a rebuff; his life at various preparatory schools, lived so independently of adults — apart from the time spent in classes where adults are merely professors, not human beings — had fostered in him a self-reliance and self-sufficiency that rebelled now against condescension, against patronage, against that subtle, salutary reproof which lay in the old Judge's level tones, and which sent the hot blood to Michael's swarthy cheek again, as he thought over it, as though the correction had been physical.

And yet, despite its intensity, the boy forgot his indignation suddenly, for as he turned the landing of the wide, easy staircase, a white, little night-gowned figure stood on the step above, uncertainly regarding him.

"Why, little girl," he said stooping down to her, "what are you doing out of bed?"

"I came down," she said gravely, "to make your eyes well. Do they hurt? — let me see. Take me up."

Michael looked down with a frown. Little arms had never been held up to him before; their compelling power surprised him even as he stooped perplexed and lifted the child. She put an arm confidently about his neck and he carried her up the stairs. All the time her soft little face was snuggling into his, and her voice fluted caressingly in his ear.

"I waked," she was whispering, "and I sat up in bed and spoke to Twixy. 'Twixy,' I said to her, 'there 's a boy asleep in our house.' But Twixy would n't wake! 'And his eyes hurt him, Twixy,' I said, but she did not wake, so I got up to make your eyes well, because Mammy Prynne says they hurt — hurt you, poor boy — poor boy."

It was the crudity and hardness of boyhood probably, added to personal peculiarities of temperament, that made Michael Thwaites resent pity like a blow. But this cooing, chanting murmur had a quality in it as gentle, as tentatively tender as drops of rain from a smiling sky.

"You must go back to bed, little girl," he whispered, his big voice falling into softness of itself, so little he had willed it. "I'll carry you back."

"Yes," she agreed, nodding with sweet reasonableness, "Mammy Prynne would worry about me. But first I will make your eyes well, poor boy. Here!" And with a very definite touch she placed a tiny, cool finger lightly and with exquisite gentleness upon either eyelid of the rough-hewn face so near to hers, holding it closed and waiting in silence and with perfect gravity for a cure to be effected. "Is it better?" she asked after a moment.

"Yes." Gruff Michael uttered the pretty fib as though his boyhood had been passed among babies.

"I'm so glad — so glad!" she murmured. "I'll make

it well more." And the treatment was recommenced. "You can carry me up just the same," she added after a moment. "Mammy Prynne might wake and worry."

So Michael Thwaites, this first night at Thorley, stumbled obediently up the stairs, a child in his arms and, entering the nursery where a night-lamp glowed, on his tiptoes, put her down quietly and carefully. In the bed beside hers she herself seemed to be lying asleep; but the expression of gentle, hovering care with which she regarded the sleeper, as she bent over for a moment, made of her a tiny Madonna, even to the unimaginative boy who had retained himself, though half unawares, as the champion of her twin.

And when later he applied to his smarting eyes a remedy which he was doggedly determined to use every night before going to bed, he thought with a smile, that was all awry with pain, of those cooling light finger-tips of Tessy Thorley's that would have healed him.

CHAPTER III

DEAR FATHER [Michael wrote to Dr. Thwaites]:

I guess I'm going to like it pretty well after a while. I guess it's a long time since Judge Thorley had a son of his own: he don't seem to know much about boys, and makes me mad sometimes when he treats me like a kid. But really he's a nice old chap, outside of this, and I guess we'll get on. He said a lot of nice things about you. It's funny to hear him speak of you and him as boys. I tried to make him understand that fellows brought up at home were a lot more babied than fellows like me who have been away at school. But he's not very keen; all he said was, with that half-grin in his eyes that always makes me hot: "Boys, my lad, are boys." I wonder what he expects them to be—kangaroos?

But he's really a good old chap. He's got a horse for me to ride till Sara comes, and I'm to teach the little girls to ride. He's got a lot of silly notions about them, not about riding, he's sensible there. They're queer little tykes, the twins, not a bit alike and more interesting than babies usually are, I guess.

There's a boy here I'm going to like, though I thought at first he was too much of a sissy, and there's a girl named Anne who's a gusher. I can't stand her. She's heard about Ma.

I'm keeping up my work in half-day sessions at the High School here. The old Judge was mighty good about helping me to arrange a course that would n't be too much tax on my eyes, and he had the head-teacher up to dinner one night so that we could talk things over. It was mighty kind of him and convenient — if only he would n't talk of a fellow right before you, as he does, till you get hot inside and out. Was he that queer kind of guy when you

were at school together, and did n't you feel like punching him sometimes, so he'd shut up?

You must n't think that I'm not good friends with the old Judge—he has me to dinner very often with him, and I can run my own part of the house just as I please, and I guess he'll get to understand letting a fellow alone.

My eyes are better. That devilish treatment Dr. Winslow said he knew I would n't stick to, I take every night; tell him, will you? I don't want him to think that I squeal and stop for a little pain like a girl.

I'd write to Ma, but don't know just where she would be when the letter got there. Please send her this.

Your loving son,

MICHAEL.

When Michael Thwaites re-read this letter three years had gone by; he found it among his mother's papers—she having saved it quite as an ordinary, home-keeping mother might. Michael had the grace to blush when he looked it over, but it did not surprise him, having youth's strong sense of unchanging identity, to discover in its crude contents much that was still himself. He still burned at the possibility of appearing ridiculous; though possessed of a sense of humour, he could be roused to rage by an ironical prick; to his strong nature no hint had yet been given, no possibility could he have credited, of discipline and experience that in time make man's offspring human.

This Michael of seventeen came back to Thorley, after the short interval when his mother's fatal illness had called him to town. He brought back with him a lasting memory of her as she was at the hospital; an impression of her fallen back upon her pillows, her hair in a light-brown mass lying about her pale, large-featured mobile face, that not all her days of activity and strength had bequeathed to him.

"My boy," she said, ruffling the black hair from his forehead with a large, capable hand, "you have n't had a great deal of mothering — have you, Michael?"

"Did n't need it," the boy answered.

But the mother instinct in the dying woman divined how much of this laconism was habit, and how much was pent-up emotion torturing a reticent soul. "I don't know — I don't know," she murmured. "We know so little. But this I do know, and I'd like you to know, Michael: What I did, the kind of life that kept me from making a home for you, was not done for vanity's sake, or for pride, or contentiousness, or even for justice — for myself. It's not women like me, but the workingwomen so terribly, terribly poor you could n't realize their poverty, who must be given every possible help to right their. . . . But," a weary, whimsical smile parted her pale lips and her voice fell, "I'm not going over that again."

She closed her large, short-sighted eyes and there was silence. When she looked at him again she asked, "And what are you going to be, Michael? A surgeon, after all?"

"Yes. I mean, I think. . . . Do you care?" he added shyly.

"Yes, I care that you should be what you want to be. But I care with all my soul that you should want to be more than merely a professional man. That's too — effeminate. Yes," she added resolutely, "I mean that. If occupations are sexed, what affair is it of man's, this womanish business of patching bodies, of gossiping with pen instead of tongue, of colouring canvases rather than faces, of making pretty sounds on musical instruments or pretty clothes on unmusical ones? Is this worthy the best brains, the biggest hearts, the finest souls? And if these distinctions are man's monopoly,

why does n't he stop playing with toys and being the world's housekeeper, and take up the great soul's burden and birthright — to battle for the weak against the strong? There's only one great profession, remember — helping the world to be a better world. Wait, dear," she broke off and her voice took a gentler pitch, "don't give it much thought now. Later it will come to you, I believe — I hope — I pray. And when it comes you'll know there's nothing in the world like it. . . . I think I'll sleep now. Good-night, my son."

As Michael bent over, she put a hand on either side of his dark face, repressed as far as he could accomplish it into inexpressiveness, and her eyes looked past his limitations of sex and youth to the humanity within him. Neither spoke as she kissed him upon the forehead, the eyelids, and the lips, and after he had gone she touched tenderly a drop upon her cheek that had fallen from his stormy eyes. Though she lived some days after this, her love for him was strong enough to spare him further leave-taking, and she died alone, except for her nurse, one midnight before her husband could be summoned to the hospital.

So Michael carried something else back to Thorley, besides the revelation of his boy's self in his letter. It was a very tender something that made him gnaw his lip and scowl more blackly than ever when his mother's name was mentioned, and it lay secretly at the bottom of his heart by day; but at night sometimes it stirred and remembered and, after tears had relieved him, his precious new memory rose before him significant and gracious, and wrought within him that which mothers can work always — if not in their lifetime, then after death.

The small remnant of Michael's childish antagonism was

blotted out in the handclasp with which the Judge welcomed him back to Thorley. That he should not make mention of what had called Michael away was more than the boy had hoped. He had steeled himself to bear condolence—he was met with unworded sympathy, and his sore but still savage heart was grateful. He escaped as soon as he could, but on the landing a little figure confronted him, and a quick frown of apprehension knit his brows; but in a minute it was gone. For it was Tessy, he saw almost immediately, and not Trix, who was waiting for him. And yet Trix was his favourite, first, because of chivalric perversity, and afterward because of the sheer sheen of youth and spirits that played in her. But it took courage to meet Trix, or answering youth and spirits equal to hers, and Michael was bankrupt in all three the day that little Tess met him on the staircase at Thorley, took his hand in both of hers, put it to her cheek and rocked over it in silent tenderness, as though it were a conscious thing that suffered and needed comforting.

In a moment she was gone, and Michael had gained his room. And the next morning, after a deep night's sleep, the rarely awakened emotional side of him was quieted, or at least hidden.

Everything at Thorley contributed to restore him to himself—the placid routine of the customary, the atmosphere of unbroken peace, the every-day bustling activity of Mrs. Prynne, the measured rhythm of Judge Thorley's rocking-chair when he smoked and read the papers, and even a certain little musing cough of his that had grown familiar; but above all Trixy, a witch of sunshine and irresistible merriment, a gleeful incarnation of youth and health and activity, whose syllables of musical speech ran and stumbled gaily over each other in a sort of spoken

grace note, whose very walk had an extra skipping step that could not be quieted into any known human gait, but was nearer a certain cantering quickstep her pony was capable of when not teased beyond endurance by that capricious creature, its mistress.

At least, so Michael vaguely thought as he watched her the next morning when they rode together. She was rarely beside him, but often with a rush, swiftly passing him, or dashing in a contrary direction. But oh, the healing there was for him in her! It was morning, and he was young and had slept away the shivering blight that Death's first breath sends over the inexperienced; and this small creature of mirth and action seemed specially to dance before him to reconcile him with the ways of Nature — as everlastingly childish and wanton as herself; to hint to him the wisdom of short, short views, of the morbidness of emotions that rack, of the philosophy of light-heartedness or no-heartedness, but merely contentedness. It was like playing with a blithe collie, to be out with her riding over the sweet wind-swept hills and along the river paths that sang of sheer, glad animal living, with no past and no hereafter.

She chattered as they rode, telling of the multitude of small happenings that filled her days. Things were always happening to Beatrix. Never a childish saga she sang that was without adventure and climax of which she was the heroine. So vital a thing was she, she could not conceive of a recital — much less an occurrence — which did not have to do chiefly with herself. Though Tessy often cried out in childish nightmares of perils threatening her twin, Trixy never could quite comprehend so strange a phenomenon; she never dreamed save of herself, for nothing in the world was so vivid to the child, so thoroughly interesting as that

same self — and perhaps this big playmate of hers who had skated with her in his arms when she was little more than a baby, who had swum with her upon his shoulders, who had striven to terrify, to daunt, to test her when he was younger, with an impish desire to tease, yet had never measured the extent of her fearlessness nor her trust in him.

Usually he delighted in and encouraged her daring; it was a sort of tribute to himself, her unquestioning attitude of faith and courage, and it aroused and excited him almost as rivalry with one of his own sex and years, to play a daring game in which he had to reckon with her reckless audacities and his own responsibility, and still get the fullest zest out of risks and ventures that stirred his blood and filled the child with exulting delight.

To-day, though, he tried to moderate, to temper this dryad-like ardour which the boy in him had often provoked. The horses had not been out of the stable for a week, and that very abstention from outdoor feats which set Trixy's blood afire made the animals as eager, as uncontrollable as she. And she was uncontrollable. For the first time Michael recognized this; the first time, because never before had he sought to restrain her. There was an impish perversity in her that was scarcely human or childish, a recklessness that roused admiration in him, but anger, too, and fear.

It all happened quickly. With a secret dread of the effect of attempted compulsion, he had made a feint of turning back, and then when he thought her cornered, setting spurs to his horse, dashed madly after her and tried to grasp her reins; but pivoting about in the scant trap that barely gave her pony foothold, she swerved and dodged and sent the frightened creature flying up a ridge, from which the falling stones rattled down upon Michael raging below.

"Stop it, Trix," he shouted. "Stop it — I tell you! If you don't, I'll —"

But with a laugh of daring and of malice she brought her whip down upon the pony's flanks, and the terrified creature backed and slipped, then regained its footing and bolted across the ridge into the orchard beyond.

How could a child regain control of the maddened little beast? How could a child have half a chance for life in the thickly planted orchard where she could not see twenty feet ahead of her?

Over and over in his mind as he wheeled about and made a circuit to intercept her, fearing to add to the pony's terror by pursuit, Michael asked himself the questions. When he came upon the hillside orchard all in gracious bloom of white and pink, and saw the riderless pony browsing contentedly and the human blossom held in the crotch of a gnarled apple tree, he caught his breath with a sob, so sure he had been that death had gathered that flow. But the child, white and defiant, laughed hysterically at him when he reined in his horse.

"Put out your arms, Mike, and I'll jump," she cried.

He lifted her down from where she clung and set her before him. The arm with which he held her trembled as though suddenly palsied and, his ashen face set straight ahead, he turned toward the house. The child shot a timid glance at him; it was not the face of the boy she knew, but of a stern, grim stranger. She did not say a word on the way home, her tripping tongue was stilled, and she felt chilled and troubled.

Michael set her down at the door and Tessy, her favourite doll under her arm, came running to meet them. At sight of her, the child's nervous tension relaxed, and all the bravado

of the dangerous prank left her as she fell sobbing into those motherly little arms.

"Oh, love me, love me, Tessy," she sobbed shaking convulsively. "I've been so bad, I've been so bad!"

And Tessy's doll slipped unheeded to the piazza floor while, both arms about Trixy and murmuring soothingly, she drew her into the house. She had no word for Michael, only a look of grieved reproach. Tessy expected her world to make allowances for her turbulent sister; to avert this "badness" which tormented the one and afflicted the other as though it were an irremediable and unescapable shame.

Judge Thorley sold Trix's pony, whereupon Tessy, too, promptly renounced riding. But there were pleasures left; Beatrix could run and sing and play, and skate when the pond was frozen over, with a swift, swallow-like motion that was part dancing, part flying. She could outswim any child at Thorley. She was a dauntless climber, and she found a queer sort of satisfaction in getting niched in some tree that Michael was bound to pass in his rides and, smiling maliciously down at him when he came along, she taunted him with being afraid for her!

As to her badness, which she had so bewailed, that troubled her not at all after Tessy had once soothed her into tranquillity. The punishment which her grandfather inflicted promptly released her, it seemed to her, from any further consequences. She gloried in punishment, did Beatrix Thorley; it enabled her to display the stoicism which was her only admitted virtue, and to her jesuitical little mind, discipline freed her magically from blame and settled complications quickly and finally.

"She's a pagan, a no-soul," Judge Thorley declared with conviction. "She has never felt *mea culpa* — and she is

incapable of wishing to atone; therefore there can be no amendment, no temperamental growth in her."

"She's only a little thing," Michael protested remorsefully. "Perhaps I could have prevented it if I had been more patient — I suppose I was really to blame."

"Most people come to that conclusion when it's a question of Trix's derelictions," said the Judge with his quiet laugh. "There's no denying the charm of the child — but it's that soulless charm that smiles back at you in shy self-consciousness from the carved lips of some Greek statues of fauns and dryads and semi-human things. Poor old Thackeray tried to give it to Becky Sharp, but he could n't draw and the result is a smirk, little and shabby. But you'll see what I mean in the Vatican galleries when Jasper takes you abroad this summer. I defy you not to think of Trix in the round Gallery of the Muses."

"Poor little thing!" Michael's pity, though vaguely expressed, was called forth by very definite criticism of her grandfather's coolly scientific attitude. But Judge Thorley, ignoring the young man's disapproval, nodded assentingly.

"Yes, poor little lacking thing! But let us keep our pity for those who will really suffer because of what Trixy lacks; she herself will never be conscious of it, never will feel the lack nor comprehend the pain she may cause. You might as well try to explain the necessity of legs and feet to a mermaid."

But Michael shook his shaggy black head and, because he lacked weapons to fight her battle with this subtle antagonist, set himself to make up to Trix in other ways. He walked and played with her in the rare half-holidays he allowed himself. He was preparing for college, but he found time to build wonderful doll houses for her, utilizing the

dexterity that had caused Doctor Thwaites to recommend a surgeon's career to him; on which occasion his son had ungraciously remarked that he intended to be a soldier, and would have nothing to do with the messy work of fixing people's bodies. But that was before he discovered and accepted the fact that even a semi-outdoor life for some years had not brought his sight to normal. As for Trix, she was a forgiving Trix; she could no more remember wrong or bear malice than she could understand other people's memories of her own shortcomings. She herself speedily forgot everything — woes and joys, for the world was very full for her, and the pleasures of anticipation shone ever alluringly ahead, promising, dazzling, intoxicating.

But life hurried, toward the end of the year, as it seems to when a phase of existence is to be finished and plans fulfil themselves. Michael faced his last day at Thorley; with what regret, with what intimate sense of loss, would have amazed the boy (could he have anticipated it) who had come there unwillingly a few years before. The old mansion came to stand for his conception of home, grew to be the image called up by the songs and sentiments of other wanderers; and when his mind and body matured and he had his own vision of home-building, it was of a family like that at Thorley he dreamed, but holding the precious possession his memory of Thorley lacked — a woman, whose hands might have bound the whole more closely and tenderly.

It was because of this lack, perhaps, that Michael's last evening was spent at the Matthewsons' house. Buxom Mrs. Matthewson, with not a serious thought in the world, except for her husband's irreligion, had a heart big enough to embrace a country-side of young people. Her house resembled the waiting-room of some busy railroad station,

orous young guest was always expected or
leave, and his welcome or god-speed from
house was usually quite as noisy as any
or his younger hosts might be capable of.
presence Michael found himself gratefully
unlike her his mother had been; she
ations, kindly indeed and full of interest,
him off his guard and made him reveal
young self than he intended.

eady a merry din in Mrs. Matthewson's
an the party from Thorley arrived. It made
bite eyebrows lift with humorous dismay;
panic to Michael; but its effects upon the
from Thorley — for whose presence at the
pensation had been granted — was all that
the heart of the jovial hostess could wish. Tessa beamed
as she entered with the Judge, for this was the first night in
her life she had been outside the nursery walls at such an
hour; but it was the little lady whose hand rested on
Michael's arm to whom the lights, the music, the gay
ring of young voices, and the buzz of a light-hearted
crowd of people seemed to appeal with a call, direct
and potent.

"For a creature without a soul," Matthewson said to
Judge Thorley whom he had piloted to the library, while his
wife took possession of the younger guests, "that Trixy of
yours seems capable of very human enjoyment."

The Judge looked out from the quiet nook upon the
merrymakers in the other rooms.

"Not very human, Matthewson; minus human, in fact
non-human, is how that small whirlwind yonder should be
described," he said gravely. "That light alert body, those

eyes that have something deep and shining in them like gold sand below clear running water or the moon at the bottom of a well — these make Trix the incarnation of joyousness, the see-er of more pleasure than is in the world's sight. There's an animal-like joyousness about her that a fine dog has in motion, in freedom after restraint, like-like the daughter of Pan conceived at his wildest."

Matthewson laughed; he drew out the chess-board and arranged the pieces for the game these two had played for a decade. "You'll notice," he said dryly, "that none of those young people out there are aware of anything supernatural in poor little Trix."

"How should they?" returned the Judge quickly. "How should they recognize the unusual in anything that typifies themselves as a body, as they are now? Why the sprite, young as she is, holds in herself as much actual enjoyment as all the rest of the boys and girls together. She's pleasure personified, is Trix; she breathes it — she is it. And unconsciously those who are pleasure-seekers, pleasure-making at this moment, recognize and exalt in it just as Paris carried Camille Desmoulins as a living banner for speaking the thing it thought, for embodying in himself the mood that possessed it; just as college boys seize the victor of the games and flaunt his skill and strength as an expression of themselves in their lustiest moment of triumph just as the world invariably crowns itself in crowning the one who happens to be keyed perfectly with it. The bell of the ball is not the most beautiful; it is she whose spirit responds most quickly and fully to the spirit of the time, on the occasion."

"Tut — tut — tut!" Matthewson pursed up his lip as he surveyed the board and made his usual opening. "A

that eloquence because a pretty child of eight can dance like a fairy and takes a child's delight in it."

"All that eloquence because I know Trix, Matthewson. If these were the good old days when the head of the family was supreme — as he ought to be — I'd clap that elf into a convent and she'd never get out."

"Good Heavens!"

"Yes, I knew such a sanctuary would shock a holy agnostic," his friend continued with sardonic enjoyment. "But it would be uncommon wisdom. Pleasure is bad for Trix, and pleasure is all she craves. She's mad for it, she'll shift her world topsy-turvey some day to get it, and it will intoxicate her, completely turn that dryad head of hers as surely as she gets a deep draught of it. And that she will drink deep, no one who has studied her can doubt — poor little creature. . . . Check!"

"Yes — I see." Matthewson frowned as he bent over the board, and soon both were absorbed in the years-old, never decided, always renewed trial of strength.

Beyond the heavy hangings Mrs. Matthewson's young world sang and chattered and danced. Even Michael's sombre, heavy-lashed eyes were alight. He looked into the face of the demure little brunette beside him, who was Grace Matthewson's latest chum and, for the first time, it occurred to him that that fever which burned in other boys' veins might set even his steady head aflame. What contributed largely to his pleasure was a boyish feeling of triumph; for this Peggy Dean whom he had carried off had been a favourite of this small country-side ball. Michael found her most likable. She did not annoy him with questions, as Anne Gregory did, about the memorial Settlement House which his mother had founded and Doctor

Thwaites had endowed in honour of his wife; and she did not keep his rather heavy wits a-jump, as did Grace Matthewson, in a clumsy dance of compliments for which no one knew better than he how unfitted he was. She had been eagerly sought after to-night by Dick Matthewson, grown very tall and so handsome that he quite realized Michael's boyish prejudice against masculine beauty; and by Ned Winslow, the young medical student from town who, as the maturest member of that gay body of young people, was a rival worth distancing. The very fact that he heartily liked these two contributed to Michael's enjoyment of the, to him, novel situation; he was too young to realize it, but though Miss Peggy was warmly pretty and daintily feminine, it was not adoration so much as the demonstrating his superiority at a new game with his boy friends, that set the blood glowing in Michael's cheek and left him eyes only for her.

Mrs. Matthewson, who had plans of her own for her daughter and the son of Winslow the famous oculist, beamed cheerily upon Michael and his lady; a form of approval which so disconcerted the boy that he withdrew with Miss Peggy to the window-seat just off the library, where no one might smile confusing approbation, except possibly the Judge and Mr. Matthewson safely deep in their second game after a piquing stalemate.

Yet both gentlemen did look up before long, for Mrs. Matthewson had sent Dick and Winslow with refreshments for the players. It was while he was making a selection from the tray that the Judge's eye strayed to the embrasured window-seat where Michael sat engrossed by Miss Peggy. She, though, with tact that was older than her years, had caught Trixy Thorley to her side, seeking to pet her, in the pretty, patronizing way girls have with a precocious child.

The Judge, with his mind still on the board and hazy with a tentative scheme to defeat his opponent, took in the little tableau half unconsciously. But in a second all of his attention was awakened and riveted by the expression of anger and dislike on his granddaughter's face, as she struggled pettishly to free herself from the constraining arm of the young girl.

"Trixy," he called. But it was too late, for in almost the same moment Miss Dean cried out and, quickly releasing the child, lifted her arm on whose tender young flesh a long blood-marked line had been traced by Beatrix's sharp little nails.

Judge Thorley rose and hurried toward her. "Trix!" he repeated peremptorily. But she did not, would not, hear him. She stood for a moment at bay, a small unrepentant outlaw, gazing scornfully at Michael's solicitude as he bent over Peggy's pretty bare arm, and then she turned and fled.

It was not far she had to go, for it was Tessy she sought — Tessy, who was her unfailing refuge and sanctuary, who seemed to know by instinct when trouble and Trixy had come together. While young Winslow, with a finely professional air, shouldered Michael aside and ordered treatment for Miss Peggy's arm, Tessy led Trix to Judge Thorley.

The culprit looked up at him for a moment awaiting the expected reproof, her eyes blazing with defiance; then suddenly, with quick intuition of what comprehension of her this time lay behind that strong old face, she held out her arms and burst into tears.

"Come, come, Judge, don't be harsh with her," begged Matthewson. "It was an accident — I'm sure it was; she was struggling to free herself and accidentally hurt the young lady. It's a trifle, a mere scratch. Don't be harsh with her."

"Harsh with her!" The old Judge lifted the child up his knee and pressed her convulsed little body to him, while Tessy laid her cheek on her twin's hand, fondling it in utter misery. "The poor little jealous thing! . . . Trixy, he whispered, "Michael will never forgive you if you don't tell the young lady you're sorry."

"I don't care!" she sobbed. "I hate him — I hate him!"

"But you are sorry, Trixy," coaxed Tessy's flute-like voice, "you are sorry, my Trixy."

Vehemently Trix shook her head.

"She is, Grandfather, she is," pleaded Tessy. "She will be — truly she will!"

The Judge looked tenderly down upon the pleading child. "Make her sorry, Tess," he said softly. "You can."

And Tessy, a tenderly compelling arm about the flushed and sobbing child, drew her toward her victim. "She is very, very sorry, Miss Peggy. Indeed she is." Tessy was almost weeping herself. "But she's crying so hard she can't tell it to you."

"No — no, I'm not!" sobbed Trix, pushing the hand from her tear-stained face. "I — I mean I'm not crying. I am sorry, but — but I hate Michael, and I'm glad he's going away. . . . Let's go home, Tessy — let's go home now, quick."

"It is little girls' bedtime," said Mrs. Matthewson soothingly. "Come, girlies, I'll get you ready."

But Trix shrank from her. There was only one heart in the world tender enough to comfort her to-night, and Tessy held her coat, and handed her her hat, and waited upon her with a solicitude that made service part of loving religion.

CHAPTER IV

WHAT do strange young eyes see abroad? What do they bring back with them of all that world of culture whose tangibility, whose reality, none can figure to himself till he has bowed down before the monuments art has raised to herself on European soil through the centuries? It troubled Michael at first, and humbled him, and temporarily his crude young strength rose in antagonism. While his father renewed old impressions and sought out those special instances of beauty which were keyed more closely with his own tastes, the boy with his insolent young mind met and challenged world-crowned works and defied them to compel him, Michael Thwaites, untouched spiritually and emotionally, to worship in the ranks.

They did, of course, in time, for this was a nature which, despite its savageries, had depth and fine tendernesses. In its soil fancy and feeling were native, though hidden by the hardness and crudity of youth, and the very influence against which his ignorance fought rained warm showers upon it and sunned and fructified it, till, to the young man's astonishment and bewildered, distrustful delight, he found himself yielding such tribute as made him wonder at his new self and at his old: and then he saw things he should never see again, no matter how often he might look.

But he overtaxed this new source of delight; with the intemperate ardour of impatience and ignorance, he spent himself inconsiderately, and he found to his surprise when

they reached Switzerland that the exercise had left him spiritually fagged. Perhaps it was this recent exercise of emotional capacities, hitherto unguessed, that made the boy rarely susceptible just then; for Lucerne, where he received his first letter from America always stood out distinctly for him, though subsequent impressions crowded out much that had gone before it.

The letter, though addressed in Judge Thorley's precise hand, was written by Tessy, and, as Michael read it, the chestnut-promenade, the lake, and amethyst Pilatus faded into unreality, and he saw a boy standing on the stairs of Thorley, scowling to keep the tears back, while a little maid beside him strove with exquisite tact silently to comfort him.

"Dear Michael, dear," [wrote Tessy in painstaking school-girl chirography,] "Trixy says to write you cause we miss you so much and we want you to come back. Trixy says she is sorry now she did not come down out of the apple tree to say good-bye the day you went away. And she says she don't hate you really, but loves you very, very much. We both love you, dear Michael and hope you will come home soon.

"Your loving friend

"THERESE THORLEY.

"Grandfather helped me with the spelling. He says regard to his old friend Jasper—he means your father."

She was indeed a loving friend, this Therese Thorley. Remembering what copying and re-copying her conscience made obligatory, Michael realized the thought and pain bestowed upon him. He turned his back upon the beauty of Lucerne and went into the hotel to answer this letter straightway. But he had an uneasy sense of defeat when he came out again. To talk to the little Thorleys had become

an easy matter; to write, he discovered, was altogether different. He said to himself he would try again later; just now there was Switzerland to do on foot with Ned Winslow for a companion, while Dr. Thwaites went to the Italian lakes to wait for them.

Those were magical weeks of trudging over beautiful roads, through hay-sweet valleys, beside singing, shouting rivers which they traced to their glacier birth, and up and up and up with an ever-broadening perspective till the ice-queens and their court swam into the world of vision, blushing with the dawn of a new day and an ever-new caravan of worshippers from afar to cry out with rapture at their awesome beauty.

Broad-shouldered Michael, short and compact, seemed built for climbing; he had a joy and satisfaction in his body that made his days a delight and night a swiftly passing, almost miraculous, restorer. There came a day on the snow-fast heights when, having out-distanced his friend, he stood alone, triumphant, looking out upon Switzerland's masterpiece. His delighted eyes dwelt upon the dazzling, inspiring sight, and he shouted to Winslow to hurry that he might share it. Yet, even as he called, his suffused eyes blinked protesting at the glare and, sitting down with his back against a great rock, he closed the lids and covered them with his fingers. He would wait, he said to himself, and not look again till his friend should look with him. Yet the vision that he had had — that radiant court of ice-queens in their regal robes beside whose immaculateness the clouds' whiteness was a soiled and spotted thing — stayed with him. As he sat with closed eyes facing them, he compared them exultingly to a ring of rose diamonds jewelling Earth's crown, to magic fairy islands in a sea of

foam, to crests of waves of crystal breaking on an infinite sea, to glittering earth-stars hung out to challenge the sun.

He shouted again to Winslow and, impatient, opened his eyes upon the glory spread out before him. It was gone as completely as though the mists had risen and swallowed it. But there were no mists.

With a cry Michael sprang to his feet. Then silently his groping hands seeking support, he found his seat again. In the blackness which had come upon him he and terror were fellow prisoners.

All that miracle of earthly beauty there, there at his feet. He strained his eyes, smarting with burning pain now, looking in vain for it. He could not see. And suddenly, as he sat there shut in, isolated, helpless, the horror of such solitude came upon him. He had a frightful moment of mad, suicidal despair. But it passed and, turning from the precipice that tempted him though he could not see it, he covered his face with his hands.

Up from below there came a peal of laughter from a party climbing from the Riffle Alp, and involuntarily he turned to look. He caught his breath; it seemed to him he saw faintly, obscurely, a dim light upon the blackness that engulfed him. His suffering eyes closed quickly and, with a prayer for patience, he covered them again and lay still and waited. The black minutes were terribly long and his brain was busy as he lay there. He thought of his mother as he had never thought of her before, and a longing came upon him which, it seemed to him, must be assuaged. He thought of Thorley and saw himself there, standing on the stairway, a child's tear-wet cheek pressed against his hand, and, feeling in his pocket, he found the letter from his loving friend, Therese Thorley, and its touch was a blessed

reminder of things earthly, lovable, human, in which he had part. He held it fast in his shaking fingers and, mentally, he read again its simple words. And then he waited still a few more moments before he ventured to make the test.

Something seemed to be lifting like a fog, and when he saw (strangely enough in the first second he was not conscious of that world of Alpine beauty) it was just three words of the paper he held at short range — “Dear Michael, dear.”

Ned Winslow came panting and hallooing up the steep ridge, and his reddened, snow-burned face went white at sight of Michael, outstretched, limp, and sobbing convulsively.

“It’s all right, Ned,” he gasped reassuringly. “But let’s get down to the town, quick, quick as we can! I — I thought it had come — the blindness. But — I guess it was the snow.”

He had a horror of the heights. There was no longer any beauty in them for him, and when the train dived down into the valley, he did not once lift his eyes to the mighty, grotesque Titanic Horn which dominated all that world of swelling snow-crowned peaks and glaciers, forests and down-tumbling streams.

The oculist whom Dr. Thwaites consulted in Milan said much to him in French which his son could not understand; in deliberate English he added to Michael a recommendation to be careful of his eyes, to give up smoking, and to avoid strenuous exertion.

“Does he mean by that,” Michael asked his father as they walked past the Duomo and up toward their hotel, “that I’m to be a molly-coddle, not daring to do this, afraid to do that, and wondering whether it’s wise to do t’other? At such a bothersome cost eyes don’t seem——” He was

going to say, "don't seem worth keeping," but he remembered with a shudder that time on the Gornegrat when the light went out of the world. "Suppose you tell me frankly, Father, what he said to you," he concluded.

Dr. Thwaites turned to look closely at his son before he answered, as though he were weighing the young man's capacity to bear; Michael, who felt the scrutiny, squared his shoulders and lifted a dark, aggressive face in mute challenge.

"He seems to take a more serious view of the case," Dr. Thwaites said, falling into a professional habit of utterance in giving an opinion, "than Winslow did. That need n't depress you," he added quickly at Michael's rebellious frown, "for the after effects of snow-blindness, you know, make a more favourable prognosis impossible just at present. On our way home we'll stop at Berlin and see Dorthmann. In the meantime try to do what this Italian advises. It's only the most difficult thing in the world: Be temperate. Take exercise, plenty of it, but not strenuously, and not too much use of the eyes, and then only under favourable conditions. He cautions one against a violent emotional shock. He — he believes —"

But Michael burst into a roar of amusement that made passers-by stop and stare. "If that's all I've got to be afraid of, my eyes will last as long as anybody's. Come along, Father," he cried, putting his hand gaily on the Doctor's arm, "I'm likely to have a violent emotional shock if we're kept waiting for lunch much longer. I'm nearly starved, and old Ned, up at the hotel, must be famished and having fantods."

"You see, Michael," his father urged. "You've got a certain allowance of eyesight and, according to this Italian,

with careful treatment, it is going to last you through a lifetime."

"Oh," Michael returned lightly, "can't as much be said of anybody and everybody and everything?"

"This oculist," said Doctor Thwaites dryly, "has been studying probably twenty years, and has examined in that time perhaps fifty thousand pairs of eyes."

Michael laughed again, a short, self-ridiculing chuckle. "Never mind, Father, if there 's ever another Dr. Thwaites, he 'll not need so much time in which to learn to bring in so non-committal a verdict."

"But will there be another?"

"I think so," said Michael as they entered the hotel together. "Confound it, I 'm afraid there will be! Will you guarantee me eyes enough for it?"

In his gratification Dr. Thwaites grasped the boy's hand, a rarely demonstrative action in the old physician. "I believe I can, Michael," he said. "We 'll ask Dorthmann."

And the great German, gray-bearded and youthful-hearted, beaming upon the world through spectacles that must have been roseately tinged, promptly clapped eye-glasses upon Michael's nose; bade him go forth to rediscover the world and see how much more fine and beautiful it was, and to make plans boldly and fulfil them.

The world was fine and beautiful, Michael said to himself, as he went over the scene walking the deck of the steamer homeward bound. A wonderful, overflowing world with wide-breasted opportunity and illimitable hope it was, now that he could see again. Only — he kept always with him that first page of Therese Thorley's letter; not from sentimental affection for his little friend, though she seemed to have lived through a crisis with him that drew her close,

but because at night when sometimes he dreamed of the terrifying time on the Gornegrat, he would wake, turn on the light, and as a test read again those three comforting convincingly clear words in the round school-girlish hand "Dear Michael, dear."

College and life in common with young humanity dispelled the morbidity of that recollection. At twenty Michael Thwaites was the best swimmer his university had yet produced, and a foot-ball specialist so precious, that by cramming the last two years' work into one left his teacher with a vacancy and a grievance it took months to heal. Then in his first years at the medical college, as in a quick, inspiring preface, he had a revelation of what the book he had just opened was to give him. After that there could be no question of Michael's reading to the end. In fact, it seemed to him that he could hardly look up from its pages long enough to live any other life than the student's.

But Doctor Ned Winslow carried him off to act as best man at his wedding, and Michael, after witnessing Miss Dean's transformation into Mrs. Winslow, ran down Thorley for a week with Dick Matthewson, who had come to town for the ceremony. But it was a changed Thorley. The old Judge was ill, and Michael saw him only once, for few moments, propped up on pillows, his penetrating kind eyes and flaccid, outstretched hand much more eloquent than the few words he could say.

Tessy, a shy girl of thirteen, haunted the sick-room. In the morning she read to her grandfather, and on days when his malady fretted the invalid so that it was irksome even to listen, she sat beside him, his hand in hers, and sometimes she even dropped asleep there by the bed, while the old man dozed or lay awake passively suffering.

And Trix, a precocious flirt, with that chameleon-like capacity which women of all ages have for taking on the qualities of the adored one, was playing at sweetness and light. For Dick Matthewson was studying for the ministry, and a more beautiful young saint no mediæval poet-artist, dreaming of militant grace and strength, has conceived.

It seemed to Michael, watching for some trace of the child he had known, that Trix had speedily learned the grace of deception. There was a wider gap between them than there had ever been. His years and hers had nothing in common, nor could he tempt the real Trix into unmasking; the savage, truthful, defiant, genuine creature seemed hidden behind this composed little face, shy and sweetly, softly malicious, of cream-gold skin and straw-gold hair and topaz-gold dancing eyes, mere baffling slits for one to look into and search for a soul behind. But to Dick, the child's adoration, deflected by the perfect armour of a mailed young neophyte, was the most impersonal of sentiments, and seemed to be offered up before that same shrine before which his soul was prostrated. He was at the psychological moment when, if it had not been for an excellent physique and a wholesomely commonplace environment, he might have had beatific visions, and found adequate exercise for religiosity only behind monastic walls. While Beatrix Thorley, a motherless child, undisciplined and afire with life, had attained the years when girls dream because they must; audaciously, as they would if never a Dick or a Michael lived in all their world to hang dreams upon.

They were all dreaming in those days, the four of them at Thorley. But they waked one moonlight night when the Judge's illness took a turn for the better. Though it was early in the season, Deep Hole was frozen over, and Michael

skimming the ice with a girl in scarlet on either arm, felt almost that these twins did in truth halve but one identity so rhythmically inter-balanced was their motion, so exact was the wave that rose on his right and fell on his left, so alike they looked, so indistinguishable the voice of one from the other.

But Trix broke away from the two, precisely as the old Trix would have done, said Michael to himself and, a small slight dervish in scarlet, danced out into the moonlight alone. It was a wonderful white night, keenly cold; the stripped trees seemed blue-black under a thin, wind-swept sky clear luminous, frosty green, and that little whirling figure in a ecstasy of flight sped on and on, as though only motion could express its delight.

"See how she goes! It is n't skating, it's flying. Isn't she lovely?" cried Tessy, her eyes shining. "What's she most like, Michael?"

"Like the gay little boats, I'd say now I've seen 'em, whose sails flash between the sunny sky and the dancing water of Como," he said, watching the figure ahead. "Or like the high, poppy-strewn fields of Brabant when a summer wind passes over them, or like the Norwegian river Voss, or anything that's free and vital and full of grace — and very much like you, Tessy," he added, looking down upon her.

"Like me!" she exclaimed. "Not really, Michael. I guess you've been away so long you see the resemblance only strangers do. We really are not alike, you remember, Trix and I."

"Yes, I remember," he agreed smiling. "But Trix is a good these days."

"Isn't she!" Tessy cried proudly. "I'm so glad you see it."

"Who would n't?" he demanded quizzically. "It's the most amazing thing at Thorley — who could help seeing it?"

"Grandfather." Tessy's tone was sober now.

"Does he think it's too good to be true?" asked Michael.

She nodded. "Don't laugh," she said, pulling impatiently at his sleeve. "I knew Grandfather was getting better when he began to say cruel things about Trixy."

"Not cruel, Tess."

"But they hurt," the girl said slowly.

"Not Trix?" he asked incredulously.

"No, they hurt me for her."

"That's because you're such a sweet little saint, dear Tessy, dear, and Judge Thorley contrasts her with you." With a remembering pang of gratitude he put his hand over hers; all that the world held for him of tenderness was centered here.

But she slipped her hand from his instantly. "I'm not — I'm not!" she cried. "And I've told him so. No one knows how bad I am — in here." She put her hands vehemently to her breast. "Just because I don't always act out the wicked things inside of me, as poor Trix does, they call me the good one. And I'm not!"

"Ah, but Tessy —" He could but smile at such depravity as might lurk in this little friend of his, but he could not ridicule earnestness like this. "Surely you are."

"Well!" she exclaimed, facing him, white in the moonlight, "if I am it's — to atone, Michael; for, every now and then something makes me do things Trix would n't dream of doing, when she gets without trying what — what I can't try for. And then everybody shudders at the real me and they say, horrified, 'And that's the good one!'"

"As Mrs. Prynne did the day I arrived, years ago," he supplemented, striving to give a lighter tone to her thoughts.

"Yes, and as she does now — and so does Trix when — when I — see things crooked and — and . . ." She fell silent.

He put her hand back on his arm and held it there. "You still have Trixy days, Tess?"

She smiled assentingly; she had not heard the phrase for years, and it recalled her babyhood. "Not really, though, you know, Michael. I mean, we don't change as we used to, Trix and I; but sometimes I'm afraid something changes for me, in spite of me. I'd be satisfied if my being bad kept Trixy good, but why should either of us be? It's all the difference between caring and not caring. It seems to me I have n't ever wanted anything passionately — with my whole soul, as Trixy wants many things. Oh, if I ever should! And what shall I do if when I am grown and grandfather's gone and not here to help me to understand things — what shall I do if I do something to hurt her?"

"To hurt Trix?" he repeated incredulously.

She nodded miserably.

"Look here, Tessy-girl," he said sternly, "has Dick been teaching you morbid holiness?"

"Dick teaching me!" she repeated shrinking, "I — could n't say this to Dick — but I'll feel better if someone knows it. Grandfather won't believe it, but you know now, and you'll not let me cheat you ever, will you? You — you're good Michael, honest and good . . ."

She had withdrawn her hand again, and stood a little apart from him; the colour flushed his face at the word applied to him by innocence such as this.

"I want to go back to Mrs. Matthewson now," she said in a low voice.

"All right," he agreed, turning to skate back with her, but she broke from him crying, "No, go and get Trix; she's going too far." And in a moment was speeding straight across the arabesqued white floor of the ice toward the bonfire on shore.

Michael looked from her to the little scarlet figure ahead. Was there actually a certain amount of perversity which these two were compelled to share between them? His heart was sore for little Tessy; it seemed to him no other suffering on earth could touch him as hers did, however unreal or fanciful it might be. He turned and was about to hurry after her when Grace Matthewson passed him.

"Go after Trix, father says," Grace called as she glided toward shore. "It's really not safe beyond the——" And he lost the rest as she went on.

But it was enough. As he sped forward Michael reproached himself for permitting Trix to leave him. He had not skated of late years, and his progress seemed absurdly slow as, his eyes upon that light figure, he hurried on.

Once he called to her but, though she turned, in a moment she was hurrying on again. Why? Michael asked himself. And then, clear across the lake, coming toward them, he saw a long straight figure, full of vigour and grace. It would take much to stop Beatrix Thorley on a night like this with Dick Matthewson just ahead.

Michael's body shot forward; the ice, it seemed to him, certainly did not bear well out toward the middle, but the little red figure was still far ahead. He remembered his similes of a moment before. Oh, if the boats on Como were out in a storm! If the waving grass of Brabant should be

laid low! If the merry, leaping Voss should be forever stilled!

"Trix!" he called, "Trix! Danger!"

But she laughed back at him, shaking her curls; she knew the skill in her light, quick body, and — Dick Matthewson, who skated so rarely nowadays, was coming toward her.

"Go back!" she cried to Michael, "you're too heavy for it!" And she bent forward in her flight.

"Trix!" he shouted angrily, "come back!"

But she would not answer. Michael hurried on. He was gaining on her now, in spite of her fleet little body and determined wilfulness. A fury at being overtaken seized upon Trix; she had counted upon skating back across that magical white path, virgin here, but for the traces of her own skates, with this new, preoccupied Dick, just returned from the divinity school. She turned upon Michael. "Go back!" she cried, stamping in her vexation, "I won't come with you — go —"

And then the ice broke. With the lightness and speed of a swallow she turned and fled, but beneath Michael's feet the thin sheet shivered in a million cracks.

It seemed to him a terribly long second before he went under; but the icy black water below galvanized him into action. He held his breath and swam in an ice-capped fluid prison, seeking a breath of air to continue his fight. But he could not find the opening and he went down through black strata of cold that benumbed, that half-paralyzed him and that must have robbed him of his senses for a moment for, without remembering how he got there, he found himself at the surface on the spot where he had broken through, taking in deep breaths while he strove for a hold on the cracking ice. But it gave way in his grasp as in a nightmare of horror, and

down he went, sucked down into a nothingness that seemed to freeze the marrow in his bones yet made the blood pound in agony at his temples.

When he rose to the surface again and felt the night air, he was almost exhausted, but he heard as in a dream the shouts on shore and Dick's cry from some point nearer which he could not locate, and his words, "The plank — Michael — the plank!" seemed to detach themselves from the crashing noises in his ears.

He did n't know then what caused the frantic, uncertain motions of his hands; he thought confusedly that he was still below in the blackness, but he clutched the plank at last and held to it (though the ice seemed to give at every tug from the rescuers) with a tenacity which was all that was left to him.

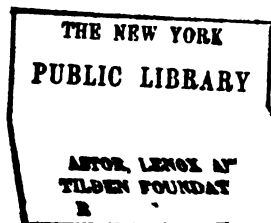
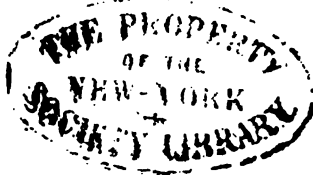
When, in a physical agony which he never forgot, he awoke to consciousness on shore and felt the heat of the bonfire, he still had hold of the plank with one clutching hand, and he fought when they tried to take it from him. And yet, before long, he was sufficiently recovered to recognize Tessy's voice at a screaming pitch of anger and excitement.

"I will not — will not come away!" she was crying. "Don't you dare to touch me. I'll stay here till he says 'Tessy,' and if he never says it again I'll — I'll throw myself into the water, too!"

"Tut — tut!" Mrs. Prynne's voice came to him and to the sobbing girl she was striving to quiet. "Don't you hear that he's all right?"

But Tessy tore the restraining hands away and threw herself down beside Michael.

"And that's the good one!" Mrs. Prynne exclaimed resignedly.



With an effort Michael opened his eyes. But no tear-disfigured face could he see close to his, nor the alarmed friends about him; not even the fire which he felt upon his tingling face.

He understood — quickly this time. His lids fell and Mr. Matthewson, bending over him, thought he had gone back into unconsciousness, for his lips were moving, though no sound came from them. But Michael was only repeating over and over again, to keep up his courage and remind himself hopefully of that dawn which had followed blind night on the Gornegrat, three words — “Dear Michael, dear — dear Michael, dear.”

CHAPTER V

"Two things I've learned about the care of my eyes: it is bad for them to become snow-blinded and it is wise not to be half drowned [wrote Michael to his friend Winslow, from Florida]. As to after effects from pneumonia, don't you believe what the books say. Down here in Balmydom I breathe as though I had four lungs instead of a couple of inflamed ones. But I'm satisfied to wait till Spring is assured up your way; particularly as father, who has given up practice, you know, to turn professor in his old age, devotes himself to reading to me. I say, Ned, it would make you cheer to see the old man go patiently over the A, B, C he learned so long ago, and (for my sake and the diploma I'll win in spite of that affair at Thorley) buckle down to teaching as though he loved it. I'd like to meet the son that would make a similar sacrifice for a pater. Whew, how bored he must be! But he's determined to save my eyes half the work, though there's no reason to believe they won't be right enough by the time I'm myself again.

"I'm going to Vienna, I've decided, as soon as I get my M. D., to study under Zech. He's a wonder, I'm told, with the knife. Father and he were mates at Heidelberg long ago, so it's fixed that he's to take me in. Congratulate me, and give my most cordial greetings to Miss Peggy Deane that was, and write to a fellow."

Being a well-trained young husband, Dr. Winslow handed this letter to his wife. "My dear," he said, "you might cut off that signature and keep it till it becomes valuable. Mike's headed for the top."

Mrs. Winslow made a little face. "You know, Ned," she said, "I always thought you overrated that solemn-faced friend of yours."

"I know." Doctor Winslow chuckled; he understood quite well the jealous determination with which loyal Mrs. Winslow shut her eyes to excellence in any member of the profession but one. "But all the same there 's a fellow that will make history in surgery. Why, they tell me that already, in assisting in a case of spinal ——"

Mrs. Winslow put her fingers in her ears. "Don't — don't!" she interrupted. "I won't hear anything about the nasty cruel business."

"You sweet little goose," he said, "do you think I 'd inflict any cruel business on you?"

"I don't know, but he must be a hard-hearted wretch," she went on serenely, "if he can do those terrible things so young. Ugh!"

"Well, that hard-hearted wretch has a something in those big paws of his that 's like a second intelligence," her husband retorted. "Wait, Peggy, and watch Mike Thwaites. He 'll go far, my lady. You watch."

But Mrs. Winslow was too busy with important personal matters those early years of her married life to watch anybody. She listened with patience that "positively creaked", her husband said when, from time to time, he read to her extracts from his friend's letters. She affected a gentle, patronizing surprise when Michael's name was first mentioned in connection with Zech's celebrated experiments; and, as years went by and the young surgeon's reputation became internationally established, she took refuge in disdainful allusions to "your famous friend," or "the renowned Doctor Thwaites."

Yet Peggy was an adorable wife, and mother by this time to a nest of young Winslows; and she had a not unpleasing memory of the awkward, black-haired lad who had monopolized her one evening in a masterful way. But Michael had committed the unpardonable offense of outstripping his seniors; one senior, in particular, whose delight in his friend's success was only an indication to the woman who loved him of his own exceeding worth. Still, Mrs. Winslow might have felt a puzzled sort of pity, rather than envy, had she beheld this celebrated surgeon, domiciled in Vienna since some years, whose new methods the sensational papers were exploiting.

To an American girl who noticed him one hot evening at the out-of-town garden (as, with the privilege of her nationality, she bestowed a frank glance upon those she passed, before she seated herself at the vacant table next to his where he drank alone) he looked a heavy-set man, older than his years, who held the tip of his pointed beard in a musing way between his fingers and viewed the gay crowd through his glasses, with a detached sort of interest that had something of loneliness in it as well as irony.

But Michael was not consciously lonely; he was only marvelling, with the occasional wistfulness of the reserved man, at the ease with which the world makes companions of acquaintances. He had not made friends in Vienna and, since the death of his father a few years before, he had lived much alone. Comrades he had among the brilliant men whose achievements he honoured and who had admitted him to their number; but with the exception of old Doctor Zech, who loved him, there was no one with whom he had much in common; and Michael's was the sort of nature that requires an almost complete congeniality from friends.

So he lived practically for his work, giving to it so much of

himself that it would have been strange indeed if he had not received much in return. But this hot summer night he had come out to the gardens in the suburbs with the distaste which surfeit gives; and as he sat there smoking his cigarette while the music sang about him, and the crowd hummed and drank and laughed and chattered, he pictured himself discontentedly as a limited sort of creature.

He was not living a full life, he said to himself impatiently not even living his own life, but an existence that had merely a pathological place in other people's lives; a sort of vital necessity at times of crises, he had become a surgical valve or stop-cock, ignored by the machinery of living except when disease attacked it. He looked about him — at the bourgeois family, father, mother, boys, and girls, noisily clamouring for food and drink; at the too-gaily dressed women in light frocks and great hats, laughing loudly with the cynical-eyed men at the next table; at the gallant crowd of young officers pounding with their beer-mugs on the table beyond at the frankly sentimental lovers to his right; and at the simpering, lisping, short-mustached young Austrian, a bit over-weighted with wine, just taking his seat opposite the American girl whose back was now turned to him.

They were all wiser than he, Michael declared inwardly with self-distaste. However frivolously, however wastefully they were at least in the world, and they were real parts of it not merely unnatural safety appliances trained to correct bodily errors in it.

The music, a sensuous Viennese waltz, crashed into silence and while the flower-girls flitted about, in the sudden pause, he heard a woman's voice, a sweet, clear voice, saying decidedly in very bad German: "No, I won't permit it — I don't know you. You have no right to —"

The flower-girl's insistence cut short the rest of the sentence, and Michael lifted a spray of roses from her basket and sent her off jingling the money. She stopped at the next table, where the thick-tongued Austrian bought lavishly from her and turned to present, with a gallantry that was a bit over-emphasized, his purchases to the young lady opposite. But with an impatient wave of her hand she pushed the blossoms from the table and they slipped to the gravelled floor, whence the uncertain-legged young man strove clumsily to lift them.

"Oh, hard-hearted beauty," he was stammering, "Oh, lovely Americanerin, have I not followed you clear from Ring Strasse only to —"

"How dare you!" Michael heard her cry. "If you don't leave my table, I'll — I'll call the waiter!"

Even the wine-fuddled head of her admirer was not proof against this; he giggled delightedly. "So!" he exclaimed, and called, "Kellner — Kellner!" in a rapture of amusement; and Michael, with a smile behind his glasses, partly for her anti-climax and partly at himself, rose slowly from his seat, accusing himself of still being but an accidental part of the scheme of things.

He reached the table at the moment the waiter did. The girl, in halting words, was confusedly trying to state her objections to the bibulous youth's company, while he gaily drowned her complaint in glib orders for champagne "with service for two and be quick about it."

The hurried waiter looked from one to the other with a frown; settled the question at issue in the most usual and profitable way and, repeating the order, hastened away.

The girl rose from the table; her eyes were blazing and as the fatuous youth, clasping her hand, sought to detain her, she turned upon him and, in her wrath forgetting the imper-

fectly acquired tongue, she said to him, under her breath, but in forthright English: "You contemptible puppy! You nasty little flirt! I wish I knew some American here who'd beat you. I wish I'd had you arrested in the street for ogling me — you ugly little beast! Now, don't you follow me another step. If you do ——"

A threatening silence followed, and it was in that moment that Michael began his speech. "It seems, Meinherr," he said suavely, "that the young lady, a compatriot of mine, I understand, does not appreciate the honour of your attention. It seems ——"

The youth rose to his feet, belligerent at once. "It seems, Meinherr," he roared — but suddenly stopped to look with wonder at the young lady, for she had grasped Michael's arm with both of her hands, crying with delight, "Michael — Michael Thwaites! You dear, dear old Mike! How perfectly lovely of you!"

Michael stared at her. She was a little creature, with a body all vivacity and strength like a humming bird's, he said to himself, and a mass of pale blonde hair arranged in the extravagant mode of the day, with a colourless creamy skin, and gray-gold eyes laughing out from gay little creases.

"It can't be ——" began Michael.

"Tessy? Of course it can't. You would n't catch Tess in a fix like this!"

"Then it's Trix?" he questioned, half unconvinced.

She nodded and, her hand in his and keeping close beside him, as she turned away with a swift side glance of reprobation for her unwelcome admirer, crowed: "You dear, dull old Michael! I knew you the minute I heard your voice. And you would n't have known me?"

He shook his head as he gathered up his stick and hat

quickly from the chair where he had left them. She, too, stopped and, her eye falling upon the spray of roses lying beside his plate, she lifted the flowers and fastened them with a caressing touch in the lace that hid the first button of her jacket.

"I guess," she said with conviction, when he had put her into a droschke, and the gardens were a glowing fairyland of light behind them, "that I 'm a goose."

"I think," said Michael, "there can be no doubt of it."

She lifted her eyebrows and twisted her small red mouth into a critical, deprecating grimace. "You need n't agree so promptly. You always were a literal kind of fellow," she pouted.

He laughed. She went to his head; everything she did seemed to him adorable. "But you, Trix! Who — who could have foreseen what a fascinatingly lovely thing you would become!"

"Michael!" She faced about with a squeal of delight. "Am I — am I pretty?"

"Are you?" he repeated dryly, withdrawing his hand from hers. "I 'll tell you when you have explained what made that tipsy young Austrian think so."

"Well — well ——" Beatrix leaned back in the carriage with an air of maidenly dignity and reserve. (When Michael knew her better he came to recognize this preliminary attitude of utmost propriety as the preface to confession of dereliction; it was a semi-unconscious, semi-artistic anticipation of fault-finding that was meant to be irresistible, and it was.) "Well, it's this way. I came abroad with Mrs. Matthewson, you know. Tess would n't leave grandfather; he 's ailing."

"I 'm so sorry!" said Michael. "And Tessy herself?"

"Oh, she 's fine and dear, but oh," Trix added with a

gay grimace, "you can't imagine the things she's up to — settlement work and nursing and — goodness knows what!"

"Really! Then you —"

"Oh, me? I'm just me," laughed Beatrix, "and since Mrs. Matthewson married Grace off and she and her husband are going 'way off to the Philippines, and Anne Gregory has developed goody-goody fads, and does settlement work with Dick and Tess and simply won't be married off, why Mrs. Matthewson has sort of adopted me."

"To marry off?" interrupted Michael frivolously. He had not intended any remark of the sort; he thought he was going to listen judicially to what explanation she could possibly give of her appearance alone at night at the Prater, and then severely to lecture her. But he reckoned without a traitorous something in himself and, after all these years of soberness and repression, a mad feeling of carelessness and delight in her that made him feel like a schoolboy who has burst the chain of discipline.

"Do you know, Michael, you're not so old-looking as I thought?" remarked Beatrix with delightful inappositeness "When you smile you look exactly like the old Michael!"

Oh, the charm of discussing one's personal appearance with a crinkle-eyed girl in tan, while the droschke runs smoothly along the wide street and the summer night is filled with pleasure-seekers of whom one has the rare, intoxicating feeling of being part! "Do you know, Trixy," he said, with gentle irony, "no one has mentioned the important subject of how I look to me for years. So that now — even though you have n't said my name without affixing a certain undesirable and libelous adjective — I long to hear what you have to say about me."

"About you? About the wonderful way you cut people up? Why, I should think the papers ——"

"Hush — hush!" he said.

She smiled over at him in gay comprehension. "Well, you did n't look young, scowling there at the gardens. I ought to have known you by that scowl, but when I passed you sitting alone smoking, I said to myself: 'There's an old duffer who does n't know what fun it is to be here without Mrs. Matthewson!'"

"Oh!" Michael suddenly remembered the necessity for a clear understanding of the evening's contretemps. "About Mrs. Matthewson, tell me ——"

"Yes, I was going to," Trix continued, with a readiness that betokened a clear conscience. "Mrs. Matthewson's rheumatism got to bothering her. She has n't been real well since Mr. Matthewson's death — yes, a year ago. So suddenly she decided to come here to see Valubski — is that his horrid name?"

Michael nodded. There was something to say about the pretty little effects her light and vivacious manner of speech afforded; but Michael had self-control enough merely to comment mentally upon this charm of hers.

"Well, of course, I went with her yesterday to the doctor's, and sat there in his stuffy waiting-room with her; but this afternoon being her last visit (we leave to-morrow, you know) she decided to go alone, and so she left me resting at the hotel."

"Yes?" Michael looked up, a gleam of amusement in his eyes; this hardly explained Miss Thorley's appearance alone at the gardens, nor that of her Austrian admirer.

"Yes," Beatrix responded with a virtuous accent. "But it was so fiendishly hot indoors that I just could n't rest

and, as I knew we 'd have a long, hot railroad ride to-morrow, I decided to go out and do a little shopping."

"Uh-hum," assented Michael. He was noting the soft shadings of her gown, of her boots, her hat and gloves. They seemed all tints, more or less emphasized, of her hair and eyes.

"At the milliner's I met Betty Willis — you don't know her. She's such a jolly girl, and she and Charlie, her husband, go everywhere. They're on their honeymoon. Are you listening?"

Michael flushed and assumed an air of attention.

"Betty asked me to go to dinner with them and then later to go out to the gardens to see 'Very Likely,'" continued Trix.

Michael's eyebrows went up.

"Weli," she said, in an abused tone, as though an implied criticism had hurt her, "if Charlie would take Betty to see it, his own wife, why could n't I go, too? Besides," she hurried on as she caught a new expression in her listener's face, "Mrs. Matthewson would n't take me to it in Paris, and of course I could n't go back home and have every girl I'd meet ask if I'd seen it, and confess that I had n't. So ——"

"But ——" Michael tried to say.

"So," Trixy's soft voice firmly took up the thread of her discourse, "—You wanted to know; now I'm telling you —so, I said I'd go, and I phoned to the hotel, leaving word for Mrs. Matthewson that I'd dine with the Willises and spend the evening with them."

A mocking light glowed in Michael's eye, but his companion was not looking at him now; evidently she had reached a difficult point in her tale of adventure.

"We — we did dine together, but when Betty told Charlie she 'd asked me to see 'Very Likely', all at once Charlie got one of those silly important, responsible feelings, you know. He said he did n't like taking me there. Betty said he was absurd, and of course he was, but he got pig-headed and so I said I just would n't, after that, go with them."

"Quite right," remarked Michael gravely.

"Yes, was n't it?" asked Trixy virtuously. "So they put me down at the hotel and went off together, the selfish things! Imagine me left there on this hot, stuffy night, Michael, watching those two drive off to have a good time!"

"Yes," said Michael unimaginatively.

The flowers on Beatrix's hat bobbed and her chin lifted saucily at this unsympathetic expression. "Well, just the same, it *was* hard. When you 're young," she said with significance, and Michael winced, "you like to do what everybody's doing; not to go to bed just when all the world's flying about in carriages. I don't think I'd have minded if I had n't almost got there. So I stood in front of the hotel and a driver came up and asked if I wanted a droschke. I—I sort of absent-mindedly got in and — and then," she hurried on, "I suddenly decided I'd go alone and see 'Very Likely' in spite of that stupid Charlie Willis. It — it — perhaps it was n't quite right," she said, after a pause which he had courage enough to decline to fill, "but I just did it anyway. You know they say over here that Americans can do anything, and it would have been all right, too, if it had n't been for that little beast of an Austrian. You see, I'd been smiling and nodding over to the other side of the theatre, where I could see Betty and Charlie sitting, to attract their attention. But somehow, they would n't look my way, and all I succeeded in doing was to start that flirt

to thinking I meant him. I got up, after the first act, determined to go over to Betty, when who should I see, blocking my way with a grin a moon wide, but that fellow! I got a bit rattled and, turning quickly, went down the other aisle. This led me to the doorkeeper; he held out a check and mechanically I took it and went out. And that nasty little animal followed me! It was so dear of you, Michael, to be there," she finished, turning gratefully to him with an air of quite satisfactory conclusion.

"Was n't it?" he remarked contemplatively. "But suppose, Trix, that I had n't been?"

"Ugh! What in the world would I have done?" she asked calmly turning the query tables upon him.

Her air of questioning naiveté quite upset his plans and he laughed aloud, a musical bass roar she had n't heard for years. It seemed quite to close the incident for Trix, so far as his disapproval might have been apprehended, for she snuggled down on the cushions with an air of relief and said confidentially, "Do you know what I had half a mind to ask you, Michael, when you grabbed your hat and fairly herded me out of the garden?"

He shook his head. He was trying to keep his mind upon this escapade of Trix's and to regard it in a judicial way, but he was really saying to himself, with a catch in his breath, that he should have missed seeing her if it had n't been for this very dereliction.

"Can't you guess?" she asked slyly.

"No, I can't guess you, Trix. You're a golden little Trix riddle to me."

"Well, I was going to ask you to take me back into the theatre to see the other two acts."

He shouted with laughter. "It's well you did n't," he said.

"You would n't have done it?" she asked resentfully. "Not if I'd coaxed?"

"Oh, you would n't take so unfair an advantage, Trix," he said gaily, bending toward her.

She gave a little low cry of delight. "There! I could have coaxed you. You're such a dear, dear fellow, not a bit of a prig, but just the jolliest fellow in the whole world. . . . Kutscher," she called to the driver, "drive quickly back to the gardens. . . . We'll see the last act, Mike, you treasure, and after that we'll go to supper at the Hoch Café where I know Betty and Charlie will be, and then the four of us —"

"Kutscher," said Michael, not daring to look at her, yet determinedly twitching the driver's coat, "direct to the Metropole."

Half-way on the turn the driver stopped to look reproachfully at this queer couple; the young lady had assumed an air of offended dignity, the gentleman's attitude was apologetic, abject, but he repeated his order and the driver obeyed.

"I wish I was married," said Trix in the tone of utter dejection that accompanies an even more desperate wish.

"You will be," Michael assured her.

"Yes," she accepted the assurance complacently, but hopelessly. "But when?"

His inability to answer her in the one word that beat behind his lips made him dumb. She drew in a little hypocritical breath that was eloquent of her unhappiness and his indifference to it.

"It would have been perfectly proper," she said as she stepped out of the carriage before the hotel, not deigning to put her hand in his, "with such an old friend as you —"

almost like a — an uncle,” she added, and had her revenge.
“But, of course, you could n't *make* me go now.”

He was n't so sure of that, but he did not tempt her.
“What boat did you say you sail on?” he asked.

“The *Kaiser*, from Hamburg, on the tenth. So do I sail on the
Willises. Good-bye and — and thank you, Michael,” she
added, softening a bit.

“Good-night.” He followed her into the hotel. “It is not
good-bye, for I 'm sailing on that boat myself,” he said
somewhat to his own surprise.

“You are!” she exclaimed, and then remembering her
obdurate refusal of the favour she had asked, she added
sincerely, “How nice!”

CHAPTER VI

IT WAS pleasant to Michael Thwaites to find himself a member of a party of home-bound Americans; to have Mrs. Matthewson calling him by his first name and delegating duties to him with a motherly air; to be treated by the young Willises with that of-course attitude which presupposes one's being likable; above all, in the early hours of the voyage when ladies — even American ones — lose the audacious assertiveness which might well retard the progress of a reticent man, it was wonderfully pleasant to have Beatrix Thorley to himself, a somewhat pale and pensive Beatrix, whom he wrapped in her rugs and waited upon with a solicitous attention that was delightful to both.

For it had not taken many hours to make plain to Trix just how dependent this big young surgeon, whom others treated with such deference, was upon her own small self. Though she had been a coquette from her schooldays, she knew that she never had had such material to play upon, and knew, too, instinctively that there was glorious danger in playing with one so determined as this. But those first days it was altogether charming to be cared for by so distinguished a person, and to make all the preliminary moves in the pretty game under the approving eye of Mrs. Matthewson and with the old semi-relationship of childhood to sanction it.

But then came convalescence and quick recovery, and Trix in the yachting suit of a girl of fifteen, looking like a child,

was an altogether different creature from the languid young lady who had permitted herself to be waited upon, who had gossiped gently about Thorley people and old Thorley days.

She had a merry tongue, this girl, witty and pert, that loved to amuse itself at other people's expense; she had an apt nickname for everybody on board by the third day out, and began to hold little seances in a certain snug retired spot at the head of the aft gangway, at which her clever mimicry of everybody unfortunate enough to be older or younger than her own particular set was served up for its delectation.

Her success was proclaimed by gales of laughter wafted down to soberer mortals on the promenade deck, and so irresistible was her own giggle, which appreciatively punctuated her efforts, that her unconscious victims below had been known to smile sympathetically at the sound, all ignorant of its personal application.

To Michael, who found himself left below stairs when the merry little coterie assembled aloft, that unmistakable chuckle of Trix's had something diabolically young and fancy-free about it. It called and it tempted him, and, in the same breath, reminded him tantalizingly of the years between him and the joyous open-mouthed company overhead, ready to laugh at anything, to dance or to flirt, to gossip or to play nonsensical 'board-ship games, and all with a gay lot of noise and bustle and a serenely impudent assumption of its own importance.

He bore it, did Doctor Thwaites, one whole day. On the next, in the hour before luncheon when Beatrix, her friends the Willises, a certain temperamental young widow and three mad undergraduates in the fullest extravagance of college clothes were huddled in the "crow's nest," which they had appropriated, an unfamiliar blue cap followed by a

pair of shoulders appeared on a level with their gay young heels.

Instantly the eyes of the company turned with beautiful unanimity to the horizon, while three boys' voices, charmingly attuned, began sotto voce a slangily tender chorus from a recent vaudeville success, advising the world at large to

“Cluster, kiddies, cluster,
Here comes a boresome butter-in!
He 'll talk you silly,
Willy-nilly, nilly-willy,
An' never, never know you 're . . .”

But a cry from Trix stilled the impertinent voices and brought all the far-away eyes to gaze guiltily upon Michael. “Hush, boys, hush!” she cried, “it 's my uncle.”

She had the grace to blush as she gave him the title, and her twinkling eyes shot a swift, wary glance at him. But Michael had not come up the gangway marked by these impertinent young people unmistakably, though invisibly “Private” to be quickly frightened down again. So he was introduced to Mrs. Varney as “my uncle,” and young Burke, Willaby, and Morse were gravely presented. Each of the three tanned, fresh-faced youths acknowledged the introduction somewhat doubtfully, but in Michael's eyes there was only disarming amusement.

“Do you let her call you that to your face, Doctor Thwaites?” plump little Mrs. Willis asked with an affectation of disapproval.

“Does anyone let this young woman do anything?” asked Michael grimly. “And does n't she do everything?”

“Bravo, Uncle Mike, she does!” Miss Thorley clapped her hands enthusiastically. The wind was blowing; a clattering gale could be felt up here, but this was not the

reason words were pitched at *fortissimo* among these gay companions.

"Everything, I mean, that's saucy and rude and impertinent," Michael added.

"Hear! Hear!" Young Mr. Willis bellowed a hearty bass of approval, and the callow trio added a booming chorus, for no other reason except that they would have seconded anything that gave an opportunity for emphatic vocal expression.

"Michael Thwaites, I was going to make room for you up here," pouted Trixy.

"Oh, do — do — I appeal to the company." Michael looked over Trix's head and caught the laughing eye of Mrs. Varney. "That's what I came up for; to tell you how very exceedingly, extraordinarily young I can be if given a chance. Won't you take me in?"

"Indeed we must." With an elaborate play of ruffled skirts of lace and high heels, Mrs. Varney made room for Michael beside her. There was much millinery to Mrs. Varney, but she had beautiful eyes and a sumptuous figure to which fine textures seemed befitting.

Michael settled back into his place beside her with a sigh of content. "Thank you, Mrs. Varney, I'm glad that one of this crow's-nest of pirates has some heart."

"Oh, Mrs. Varney's got a lot of that," said Burke. "She's got all ours, you know, to add to her own, which is life-size."

He guffawed in hearty delight at himself, and Willaby and Morse joyfully joined in with their friend. So did the happy young Willises, but Miss Thorley only lifted her golden eyebrows with a faint smile and looked rather superciliously at Michael.

"Just what are your accomplishments, Dr. Thwaites?"

demanded Willis. "What can you do to make yourself one of us pirates?"

"Do?" asked Michael vaguely.

"Yes, what stunt that's useless and nonsensical and undignified, are you capable of? We'll initiate you, soon as we know."

"Oh!" Michael's dismay was delightful to the company. Evidently he was already sufficiently one of them to merit being considered amusing. "Is that the proof of youth, Trix?" he asked, his merry eyes meeting hers in affected unconsciousness of her disapproval.

"It's one of them," she answered briefly.

"Well!" He paused to consider. "I used to be able to juggle. I could keep three apples in the air in the nursery at Thorley, could n't I, Trix?"

She nodded indifferently. She was tying a ship's ribbon about her rebellious hair, in which she had stuck blue corn-flowers — the last of the flowers with which her cabin had been filled at sailing — and the resultant coiffure made her look more like a schoolgirl than ever.

"H'm!" said Willis, and he looked doubtfully at Burke.

That gentleman shook his head. "Willaby can go him one better," he said.

"Can he?" asked Michael with enthusiasm. And Willaby modestly acknowledged that he could; he was even practising with five.

"That's hard on a mere amateur," Michael remarked, discouraged. "I used to have some strength in my shoulders. Remember the time, Trixy, when I used you and Tess for dumb-bells?"

"Fine!" exclaimed Morse, "You might try it with Burke and Willaby; they're even weight."

"I should n't dare," said Michael gravely, "put such babies to so great a risk."

The trio roared and Mrs. Varney clapped her pretty, jewelled hands.

"It does n't seem so hard to be young," said Michael with a grin.

"Oh, it's easy — for you, Doctor," she said smiling up at him. "I move we dispense with an initiation unless. . . . Can he sing?" she asked, turning to Trix.

"He's tone deaf," said Trix calmly.

"I appeal," began Michael with dignity, but Mrs. Varney raised a pretty forefinger in reproof.

"Can he dance?" she asked.

"Like a bear," laughed Trix.

"This is serious." Mrs. Varney lowered her lids only to open her fine eyes full upon the candidate. Her last question she put under her breath. "Can he make love?" she asked.

"Try me!" cried Michael.

"She will!" exclaimed Burke, "Trust her for that."

"You bet she will!" seconded his mates.

"You're passed, Thwaites," cried Willis — and Beatrix Thorley looked open-eyed contempt upon the candidate, till she caught Mrs. Willis watching her.

"Put him through his paces, Mrs. V.," said Burke, "and report to us to-morrow. In the meantime I call upon Willaby for a double-shuffle."

"There ain't room, Burke," pleaded Willaby. "Sure there ain't."

But Willaby adjured him not to do the talented darling act just because there were visitors present, and the young fellow rose obediently. It required a bit of crowding to provide sufficient space for the performer, and Michael found

himself and Mrs. Varney huddled together on the right of the mast. From this comparative isolation they watched the dancer, an ugly little gentleman of incredible lightness and grace, and later listened to Mrs. Willis's coon songs, to Willaby's life-like representation of the uncorking of bottles, the starting of a railroad train, and the early morning noises on a farm, to Willis's assortment of new riddles and Morse's repetition of old tricks with new exposés; and then to Trix's imitations of the captain's heavily flirtatious manner with the ladies on board, of the mate ordering his dinner with Teutonic seriousness and confidence in his capacity, of the solicitous mother of a piano-playing prodigy on board, of a retired prima-donna who explained her past greatness with delightful naïveté to all who would listen, of a soulfully pretentious spiritualistic healer, a lady of many years and affectations.

But it appeared from Mr. Burke's insistent calling that Miss Thorley was otherwise talented; and presently Michael beheld the young lady with the ugly and graceful Willaby, while the company intoned a Negro melody, engaged in the first cake-walk he had seen. To Michael it was grotesque and displeasing, and yet fantastically rhythmic; he marvelled at the skill of the performers; he frowned at the vulgarity of the performance; he forgot Mrs. Varney (who was not accustomed to being forgot) and leaned forward, tingling in spite of his displeasure, with the youthful verve of the exhibition.

It came to an end suddenly, for in the midst of the extravagant burlesquing, Miss Thorley uttered a cry and sat down, her hand to her ankle. "I've sprained it, I'm afraid," she said with a grimace, to solicitous inquiries from her audience.

"It's a play to the gallery — you're it, Doctor," cried jovial Mr. Willis.

But Michael was not permitted to examine the injured foot. "I'm sure I'll feel dreadfully ill if I have so celebrated a surgeon look at it, Doctor Michael. Besides," Beatrix protested, "you'd surely want to show off your bone-breaking stunt on my poor foot, and I don't intend to let you. I'll be all right. Only how am I to get down to my cabin and to Mrs. Matthewson?"

"Easiest thing in the world," remarked Burke quickly.

So it seemed, for presently Michael beheld Miss Thorley, her arms across the shoulders of Burke and Morse, being helped down the narrow gangway. Mrs. Varney's solicitous questions and exclamations subsided, and soon, holding Michael's hand in both of hers, she was examining the lines of his palm with a pretty affectation of scientific absorption. For Mrs. Varney's contribution to this crow's-nest vaudeville was her skill at palmistry. And she was usually most skilful, this lightly laughing lady, in enlisting her subject's interest first in himself and then in her. She had an effective way of disclaiming responsibility for the rather daring perusals she made, by charging the lines of the hand with writing them plainly to all eyes that could read; and she had a still more effective manner of not confining the use of the eyes that could read to a man's palm.

Michael, who found himself alone with the lady in possession of the retreat (for the Willises and young Willaby had shortly followed the others) strove to play the rôle for which obviously he was cast. But even in so common a little play of make-believe as this, there is a rigidity of mind, an unsuitability of temperament, and a lack of practice which leads to self-betrayal.

Though Mrs. Varney hardly suspected it at first — or she would not have been guilty of economic waste — this subject of hers was capable of looking into glowing dark eyes and seeing mischievous gray-gold ones; he could feel the impress of beautifully soft, white jewelled hands, admire them dispassionately and yet contrast them, to their disadvantage, with a slim, unringed, and smaller pair. Now, a game limited to a company of two, requires the close attention of both participants; Mrs. Varney's experience was wide and her intuition in such matters quick and certain.

"There!" she said relinquishing his hand and rising, "that 's all I know — and besides it 's rather heartless of us, is n't it, to be up here having such a cosy tête-à-tête when poor little Beatrix must be suffering? Let 's go down and find out about her."

But Beatrix was in her cabin and she stayed there, sending sweet little messages of gratitude and assurance of continued improvement to Michael, and not permitting him to be of any assistance to her. He fretted and fumed, and tormented a straightforward, eager, masterful spirit trying to comprehend a quick and subtle one.

When Beatrix came on deck the next morning, supported by the captain's cane and Mr. Burke's athletic arm, with Morse carrying her rugs and Willaby, an ugly little drum-major dancing before the cavalcade, with a pretense of seriousness and a fetching affectation of unconsciousness of the passengers' stares and comments, Michael watched her with a frown of displeasure and bewilderment. But Miss Thorley only nodded gaily to him as she passed and soon, from her chair, her court in attendance, came sounds of glee; snatches of rhyme, of ship-made limericks, of up-to-date choruses and bursts of laughter, and all that nonsensical buzz of business with which the very young make merry.

It sent Michael swiftly back into the category of those who are expected to show adult good sense; he had not felt so old and staid since that night at Vienna when he had driven out to the Prater, seeking for escape, even momentary, into youth again. He retreated into the smoking-room where he routed a chess player who had challenged him.

"There, that will do — even for me," exclaimed his antagonist when he had lost his game.

"It's the prevailing of German thoroughness, that's all," laughed Michael, accepting a cigar. "Old Dr. Zech and I played every evening for two winters. Who would n't learn in that time and from Zech is a blockhead."

"Ah, well," said his antagonist, tugging at a gray mustache, "I've had enough for to-day. But I warn you, Dr. Thwaites, the papers, even those that vilify and abuse me, say that I thrive on defeat."

With some curiosity Michael regarded his opponent's lined face, noting for the first time his square, strong chin and direct gray eyes. The only impression he had had hitherto was of a strong man, somewhat irascible, who had been ill and was evidently convalescent.

"I know your name, Dr. Thwaites," he continued. "Everybody on board does, for we Americans are intensely proud of exotic honours. I am Archibald Johns, you know," he added explanatorily as he handed Michael his card.

But Michael was still in the dark. He returned the stranger's courtesy saying, "I'm to be a stay-at-home American, hereafter, Mr. Johns. There'll be plenty of opportunity for you to be revenged this winter. I hope we will meet and —"

Mr. Johns laughed delightedly. "Pardon me," he said, "but I think you don't know who I am. It's so novel to me

to meet a man of position who does n't scowl at the mention of my name."

"Why," began Michael apologetically, "you see I've been abroad so long ——"

"Capital!" interrupted Mr. Johns sarcastically. "What an excellent American citizen! While his country is being looted, its reputation for corruption becoming an international joke, while franchises are being bought — not from the people but with bribes to the bosses — while guilty officials join with finance freebooters in 'spoiling the public funds; while everything, including American honour, is put up for sale, and not that fact but the making public of it, is the unforgivable sin — while all this goes merrily on, one of our renegade 'best citizens' stays abroad and is unconscious even of my sensational and melodramatic efforts to sound the tocsin!"

Michael flushed. "Not to have heard of Mr. Johns is evidence to himself, I see, of extreme neglect," he retorted. "I wonder if America agrees with Mr. Johns on that point."

"On that point — yes, if your not having heard of Johns means you'd condemn him if you had," the gentleman answered readily, his somewhat irascible voice mellowing with humour. "America and I are out, you see. So far as she will take notice of me at all, she's mad at me for knowing what an oligarchic fraud she has become, and what an absurd pretense it is of hers still to pose as a republic. She's madder and gets madder every day because men like me don't keep our knowledge to ourselves. It's *lèse majesté*, Doctor Thwaites, in the land of the free, to work, and the home of the brave, to exploit, to know the truth and to tell it. The sovereign people objects to being told that it is n't sovereign, that it's an ass, a beast of burden, a tricked child cheated with forms, and a fool, a coward, and a knave besides, because

it has n't sense enough to know its benefactors and because it turns upon those who would enlighten and better it, precisely as enslaved people have done from the beginning."

Michael listened eagerly; he could not help it, so vibrant with earnestness was the voice of the man, but an unappeased resentfulness inspired his answer. "And among benefactors we include Mr. Archibald Johns?" he questioned ironically.

Mr. Johns threw out his palms as though deprecating so self-evident an interrogation. "Will include," he amended calmly. "The tense is wrong. Even the *Beacon Light* (the one small weekly in town that supports me and the Third Party) sees no hope of my canonization during my lifetime."

Michael surrendered. The man was too frankly ready to see the irony of his own position; if his earnestness was thrilling, his humorous rating of himself was delightful. Across the table Michael held out his hand. "Teach me to be a good American, Mr. Johns," he said.

"An unpopular American is the synonymous expression," snarled Mr. Johns. "Are you prepared for that?"

Michael shrugged his big shoulders.

"Your friends, you know, in the better class will drop away from you. Those among the working people will distrust and betray you," Johns went on.

"If what?" demanded Michael.

"If you join with me and a few others in exposing the corruption of the town, and strive to bring the guilty of all ranks to book. Look at me. All I have done is to advance the money necessary to expose some of the rascally officials who have made the word 'graft', an American term, known all over the world — such is America's infamy. Yet the *Blade*, a fairly decent newspaper, insists that I am inspired

by mean, personal motives, that I intend to organize a political machine and ride my way to the mayoralty. I have organized a political party; I shall do anything that's honourable to win my fight, but when it's won, I shall be the one man in the city ineligible for office."

Michael looked at him, surprised.

"You don't doubt my sincerity do you?" The question was asked simply, with a forthright directness that compelled an affirmative or negative.

"Not I," said Michael as simply.

"Ah!" The exclamation was not one of great gratification. "Few do who know me personally. But the editor of *Why?* who went to college with me, calls me a conscienceless demagogue, a dastardly schemer, a would-be wrecker of commonwealths. The *Evening Patriot* says I am a worse enemy to civilization than the anarchist who slew a poor priest one Sunday. *Truth* calls me an 'angel,' a booby, a good thing — the whole string of names that fit silly credulity. The *Evening News* says I'm crazy, and *Work*, the labouring man's paper, sees in me only a disguised foe, disgruntled with my own class and using the Unions for selfish purposes. Are you still determined to be a good American?"

Again Michael held out his hand; and the other clasped it heartily.

His new friend left Michael with much to think about. His interest was aroused and his pugnacity, and patriotism, long dormant, stirred within him. But a passion stronger than this had him in its grip and, though he had thought clearly and unselfishly under the stimulus of Johns's pro-seelying spirit, the beginning and the end of his thinking were the same, and a girl's face rose like the sun in his heart and

scattered impersonal things before it. The ship was only half-way across — the New World and its old problems were a thousand sea miles away, and on board, at hand, temptingly, distractingly near was his heart's desire. For, with all his early mastery of self and his prompt bridling of conditions that make for worldly success, Michael Thwaites at twenty-eight was as unreasoning in reaching out for the lightness and brightness that was Beatrix Thorley as a child who lifts an eager, wavering hand to catch a sunbeam.

When he came out on deck she was alone with Mrs. Matthewson, demurely watching that lady at her embroidery.

"Why, Michael!" she cried, "I thought you were up aloft 'wid de gang'."

He looked down upon her. The brown-stockinged ankle and tiny foot were outstretched, but in her face were no marks of suffering, only sweet invitation as she patted the chair beside her.

"I'm afraid, Trix," he said, taking it, "that 'de gang' 's too overpoweringly young for me. I dare n't risk two days of it."

"That 's what I thought," she said gravely.

"Why, Beatrix!" protested Mrs. Matthewson.

"I mean I thought we 'd bore you, that 's why I never asked you up. But," she continued, "you and Mrs. Varney seemed to get on capitally, and she 's the gayest of us all. That 's her laugh now." She held up a hand to bid him listen. "Is n't it pretty?"

Michael did not answer.

"Guess what they are doing?" Miss Thorley said.

"Making blithe young idiots of themselves, in one way or another," he returned. "What difference does it make?"

"That 's a kind thing to say after our taking you in as we did yesterday!"

He grinned, and presently she too smiled away her affected displeasure and, leaning over confidentially, said, "It is n't very dignified of you to be one of us up there, is it?"

"Why Beatrix!" again exclaimed Mrs. Matthewson, in a gentle aside from her work.

"No, she's right, Mrs. Matthewson," put in Michael. "I quite agree with her as to my loss of dignity."

"Do you know," Beatrix confided, "I like you much better old than young?"

"More in character, eh?" he asked grimly.

She half nodded, keeping her twinkling eyes upon him and putting out her hand as though to express more than her words. He took the hand and held it for a moment. "I wonder if you really like me at all, Trix," he said slowly, "the real me."

"Why, I adored you once, Michael," she said merrily, "Did n't they say long ago that I scratched Peggy Winslow to prove it?"

"But you've scratched me this time — why?" he asked, his eyes upon her.

"Listen," she said, turning her face from him toward the gangway whence came a burst of laughter. "Guess what they are doing."

He shook his head impatiently.

"They are making out their dance-cards for to-night so that no 'boresome butter-in' can wreck our plans."

"Plans?" he echoed vaguely.

"If you've your card full and can show it," she continued, with an open-eyed assumption of blamelessness, "you surely can't be held accountable for other men's slowness."

He smiled at the unblushing pretense with which she faced him. "By 'you,' you mean your friends, Trix?" he said.

"Yes, and me."

"You? You don't dream of dancing with that foot to-night?"

"Oh, but I do!" she cried, starting up like a child threatened with the loss of some dear pleasure. "You've never been to a dance aboard ship, I fancy, or you'd understand how out of it a girl would be if she did n't dance. My ankle will be all right by to-night," she added confidently, putting out her foot and moving it tentatively.

"Indeed!" Michael laughed. "Trix, you shall become a celebrated case in the medical journals, for you've originated a new sort of sprain. I never heard of one getting well in twenty-four hours. Either you won't dance to-night or ——"

She sat up facing him defiantly. "Or what?" she demanded.

"Or you become a case in the dry journals aforesaid. This is the way you'll read: 'Remarkable case of auto-healing. B. T., female, aged nineteen, while dancing a cake walk, tore the internal lateral ligament. Was disabled; had to be carried below. Spent rest of day in bed. Twenty-four hours later, with no treatment except a comforting assurance of naughtiness, internal lateral was entirely healed, and patient danced every dance at a ball that night.'"

She lay back without comment, and interestedly regarded the glassy blue hills and valleys of the ocean.

"Well?" he prompted.

"You doctors fancy you know it all," she said, but the pertness of the words was modified by a smiling air of being abused, which was so pretty on that little, demure, softly catlike face.

"No, we don't fancy anything. We can't — that's our

trouble. Where 's your dance-card, Trix?" he questioned abruptly.

"Mine? Why?"

"For what purpose do men ask girls for their dance-cards usually?"

"Oh, I 'm so sorry!" she exclaimed with much soft emphasis and a penitent sweetness he found delightful, though it did not deceive him. "The boys have got it up in the nest. I did n't think you 'd dance or — if — if you did," she added, meeting his sardonic eyes and poutingly hurrying on, "I supposed you 'd disapprove of my dancing, like a brute of a doctor, and so you would n't want to dance with me, you know."

"Exactly," he remarked with ironical sententiousness. "The fact that I dance like a bear had nothing to do with it?"

She shook her head with child-like positiveness. "You know I was only guying you," she said sweetly.

He laughed out, amused at her naiveté, her transparent deception, her coquetries. "I know you were only telling the truth, Trix," he said rising, "and that must be a pretty rare phenomenon, if I can judge."

"Michael Thwaites!" she exclaimed with a grieved accent.

"Beatrix Thorley!" he mocked, his eyes meeting hers with perfect understanding.

"I think you 're cruel," she said, and with characteristic inappositeness added, "you have n't even offered to examine my ankle this morning."

"No — not this morning," he said smiling back as he left her. "'T is n't necessary, you know. Consult the case of B. T., feminine, aged nineteen, very feminine — quoted above."

She looked after him as, lighting a cigarette, he climbed the narrow gangway steps that led to the "nest." In it was delightful to be so well understood, since understanding seemed not to lessen the comprehender's admiration; it gave one that opportunity to play at being misunderstood which is such advantageous ground for coquetry. Nevertheless, the big figure she looked after seemed to be made off with the honours of the encounter. Beatrix was left with an odd feeling of pique.

She had looked forward to an exciting trial of strength when she announced her intention to dance despite her injured foot, and this disappointing Michael had, in a perfunctory show of disapproval, actually asked her to dance with him. A feeling of ineptness and failure came over Beatrix Thorley's world. There had been such a dearth of interest since that meeting in the gardens at Vienna that this girl who, while she flirted with the devoted trio that courted her, felt the under-thrill of Michael's manifestation as one who crosses a cataract on a frail bridge that trembles with the roar and passion of the torrent below. Presently there came another of those frequent bursts of laughter from the "nest." It affected Miss Thorley with a sense of distaste. "I think, Mrs. Matthewson," she said, when the lady waked from a nap over her embroidery, "I'll go into the cabin and sleep for a while; it's so hot out here."

"It's a good idea," agreed Mrs. Matthewson when she saw "why did n't you think of it before Michael went out? I'll call him to help you."

"No." Miss Thorley's voice was peremptory. "Please," she amended. "I'm really doing so well, with the captain's cane and your arm, if you will be so kind

Mrs. Matthewson, I can slip in, in a minute. Please, Mrs. Matthewson."

So her patient friend helped Trix to her cabin, leaving her after she had lain down with a mild remonstrance — repeated for perhaps the hundredth time and in the same indulgent tone — against the folly of dancing with a sprained ankle.

CHAPTER VII

MISS THORLEY was an object of general interest when she appeared on deck that night. She had discarded the captain's cane and moved about without assistance, in amber net through which the satin gleamed, as did the topazes about her throat. But she had a prettily hesitant air that gave an appealing touch of invalidism to her lithe little figure, which had ordinarily so abounding a vitality.

From the after deck, brilliantly lighted and gay with flags of many nations, Michael caught sight of her at once, her piquant blondness in its light plumage shining out from the black coats surrounding her. But the band began to play a waltz that had conquered two continents and, making his way through the quickly-forming couples, Michael found himself beside her. She was standing alone and as though poised for flight for just a second before he reached her, with a look of open-eyed incredulity and an unwonted flush; for one by one, with expressions of regret, the members of her court had left her, and were already whirling their partners about to the music.

"It's our dance, Trix," said Michael.

She put her hand on his arm. "You don't mean ——" she began, and then, brightening with curiosity, she asked, "How in the world did you persuade the boys?"

He smiled broadly, and for the moment she seemed content without further answer. They made their way slowly among

the other couples, Beatrix responding more soberly to the music than the mad tempo of her usual dance-step; but as they reached the end of the improvised ball-room her partner released her.

"I do dance like a bear, Trix," he said. "It's cruel to make you pretend politely that I don't. Let's sit it out."

"Shall we?" she asked brightly. "No, really you dance quite well, and you look — I say, Doctor Thwaites, you look mighty handsome in your evening togs." Miss Thorley's spirits had revived, evidently.

He looked down upon her as he led her to the deserted rear promenade. There was nothing he could say to her about her appearance. Her beauty stirred him too deeply; he could not speak of it with commonplace compliment. "See what a night it is, Trix," he said softly. "The moonlight's like a rain of shining silver. Won't you watch it with me?"

She nodded, responding to a subtle air of excitement in him that at once tempted and startled her.

"They've bundled the chairs up out of the way," he explained, "and we don't want to settle down among the old folks to starboard. There's only one place," he added with an air of inspiration.

"Where?" she asked.

"Here!" he exclaimed under his breath, and in the same moment had lifted her in his arms and was carrying her up the narrow gangway that led to the nook aloft. He set her down there. He was trembling, and she, as she looked up at him with a white face, was trembling, too.

"How dare you!" she gasped.

"I don't know," he answered unsteadily. "I did n't think I could do it, but I found I just could n't not do it. That's all."

She looked at him in speechless anger. He returned her gaze, but she could not quench the passion in his eyes and her own lids fell.

"I — I don't believe you've acted fairly," she stammered. "Where's my dance-card? Have you got it? I want it."

He took it from his pocket and handed it to her. She bent over it in the moonlight and saw the one name written in every space.

"But ——" she began tempestuously.

He reached for the card; mechanically she let him take it and he returned it to his pocket.

"I won't have it, Michael," she said, trying to attain calmness. "You are doing it just to keep me from dancing, and I won't ——"

"No, I m not," he said, "that's not the reason."

"I'm going down," she said.

"No." He did not move to intercept her, yet she felt a compelling force in his attitude. It irked her and, throwing her head back haughtily, she looked full into his face.

"Do you mean that you will dare to prevent me?" she demanded unsteadily.

"I mean — I mean ——" His words were clogged as by wine and he stared upon that beautiful young face till it swam in the moonlight. And then he had her in his arms and was kissing her eyes, her hair, her lips, her throat with a strength of passion that left him dumb and shaken.

She reeled from him and, sinking into the little built-in seat beside the mast, she covered her face with her hands. And he bent over her, murmuring adoringly, repentantly.

"Sweetheart — sweetheart, have I hurt you — have I shocked you? I did n't mean to, Trixy — gold Trixy, if

you knew how I love you! If you could feel the love I have for you! Trixy — little Trixy, darling little Trix — forgive me, sweet. You are so tender, so tiny, so maddeningly sweet — I'm a brute — Trixy! Oh, look up! There's no light in the world for me when your eyes are hid. I can't live without you. Trixy — my love! my love!"

Gently he drew her hands from her glowing face and she hid it upon his breast. He took her to him with an exquisite indrawn breath.

"You — you terrify me," she stammered.

"You madden me," he laughed, bending close. "Come, Trix, look up, look up. The world's gone mad with joy. All the sea and the heavens are a-sing with it. Give me your lips — sweet, my sweet!"

"It seems to me," Michael was saying to Judge Thorley (he had followed Beatrix to Thorley the day after landing) "that I always knew I should marry Trix."

The Judge looked musingly at him. "It seemed to me that I always knew you would n't," he said slowly.

The quick frown that characterized Michael bent his brows. "You — I counted — I hoped you would n't be displeased," he said, taken aback.

The old man looked at him in smiling silence for a moment; he was taking in the changes time and success had wrought. And yet the man Michael differed so little from the boy, the Judge said to himself. A better carriage than he had promised, a clearer, more definite expression, a lack of height and an unusual breadth of shoulders, but the same quick, challenging boyish frown and the smile of a "black brightness," as Tessy had long ago described it.

"My dear boy," the Judge spoke with the deliberation of

age, "I shall be happy and most fortunate to have you my grandson."

Michael leaned over and took both the old man's hands. They were nerveless old hands, but they responded to his vigorous grasp with a cordiality that could not but be tinged with uneasiness from an apprehensive lover's mind.

"For a moment," Michael confessed, "I was terrified. It seems so impossibly good, I conjure up bogies that tell me it can't be true."

"'Love's a thing of anxious fears,'" quoted the Judge and added musing,

"Also a sweete Hell it is,
And a sorrowfull Paradis."

Michael laughed back into the ironical, pleasant old man's face. "Oh, but I love her so!" he cried.

The Judge bent his white head understandingly.

"I've been so much alone," Michael went on. "It is to me I never have had close enough connection with the family side of the world. Trix — God love her! — is all that, all of that to me. She'll give to me, out of the fullness of her own joyous comradeship with the world at large, a more human place in it. And for the deeper, more intimate things — she'll give those, too."

The Judge smiled and nodded again, more in silent agreement to himself than in agreement, it seemed to Michael, who had found the key long ago to that speaking old man's heart.

"And I love her so," he went on ardently, striving to find another expression, a more acutely sympathetic, less impersonal regard into those shrewd old eyes. "I love her so tenderly I'll make up to her for all she gives me. You trust her to me, Judge Thorley, she's so sweet, so de-

me! She's just transfigured things for me, made the world an interesting, fascinating place to be in. I'll be able to work, to do good work. I want to live a full, an active life, not be a mere learned drone, acquiring and acquiring. I'm going to put to use the undeserved reverence people over here seem to have for what I've done; to use it to help me in real things, real life. I'm going into politics, if you please, Judge Thorley. Yes," he persisted, in response to the low, nearly silent laugh that greeted this, "have you heard of Archibald Johns?"

"Have I heard of him!" The Judge put up his hands as though to protect his hearing. "Has n't he dinned his name into the protesting ears of the country till we weary of the very sound of it?"

Michael laughed; he was familiar already with this phase of disapproval of his friend. "Johns would n't object if you only hated the thing he fights against more. But we won't go into that to-day. Despite the row my connection with Johns will kick up, I'll have more work than I can do; I've got all the money I want. Trix has filled my soul with happiness and given me a surplusage of strength and desire to share it. I'm going to try to give the world some of what she has given me."

"Yes — yes." Judge Thorley leaned back upon his pillows, his eyes wandering past the eager young strength before him to the window-garden, glowing just now with colour and sweet with fragrance. "You talk like Tessy."

"The dear girl!" Michael cried enthusiastically. "I want to see her — I have n't yet, you know, I was so eager to come to you first. Has she changed? Is she just the same loving, gentle little thing?"

"Yes," Judge Thorley said quietly.

Michael looked up quizzically. "Yes? To **both** questions?"

The Judge nodded. "With Tessy, you see," and for the first time in the interview Michael heard the note of intimate care and affection he had missed, "years can only intensify the qualities that are herself; and yet she must change, for she's a creature of mind as well as of heart and spirit. **I** don't know that I make myself clear, but if you **knew** Tessy —"

"If I knew her!" protested Michael.

"— you would understand," continued the quiet old voice, unheeding, "that development with her is that of the reasoning mind. She is one of those rare beings, one of those still rarer women, in a world cynical, critical, and grown too self-conscious, capable of convictions. In her work, which she has undertaken against — not my wish, for she would n't do that — but without my hearty coöperation, there is a quality which I am forced to respect, a feeling, for lack of which charity has become cold, selfish, mechanical giving — a sort of bargain by means of which ethical questions are evaded and esthetic senses soothed. But Tess really gives herself. And the depth of feeling of which I spoke is not due to the extravagance and exaggeration of novelty, but to a sentiment that is enduring and practical and sane as well as noble."

Michael regarded the old man interestedly — an aristocrat, whose traditions his granddaughter was violating, brought in his conservative old age to see things from an unconventional point of view. That point of view did not appeal to Michael; he felt obscurely, and without trying to analyze it, a resurging of his boyish prejudice.

"Trix told me vaguely about the Settlement," he began. "But though my mother founded it —"

"Yes," Judge Thorley interrupted. "Trix would tell you vaguely, for she has only the vaguest idea of what Tess is doing and why she is doing it. Please don't get an idea," he added sharply, "that Tessy is a faddist, that she is playing with poverty, sentimentalizing, posing. She is merely an excellent trained nurse, a young woman of heart and sense, with a strong body and some means, and a conviction that these good gifts of fortune make less happy people her creditors."

"I'm sure," said Michael stiffly, "she must be an admirable girl."

"She is." The Judge placidly ignored the grudging intonation. "She is so well-balanced that she can have her heart and her head full of settlement work, and still not neglect an old man who is very dependent upon her for what little esthetic pleasure is left in a world gradually withdrawing from him. Those flowers in my window are Tessy's thought for me; the languages we are studying together are her scheme for keeping me alive and companionable.

. . . How can I enumerate! She's the head of my house, though much of her time is spent elsewhere (She's in the city to-day: Miss Gregory is ill and has sent for her) and she's the light of my eyes and the darling of my heart."

In the presence of such emotion in a breaking old voice Michael could not but soften. "She must deserve all of that," he said warmly, "but you are mistaken, Judge Thorley, if, from that vagueness of description which I mentioned inaccurately, you suppose indifference on Trix's part for anything that interests her sister."

"Of course — of course," the Judge smiled, "I am mistaken in Trix, having studied her for only nineteen years; while her lover, who has known her in adult life for a fort-

night, is much better able to judge the young lady's character."

Michael laughed. "Exactly. I've never been able to find adequate scientific authority for your theory about her, Judge Thorley."

There was no answering smile in the Judge's eyes. He looked at Michael for a moment, then said with gravity: "You make it easier for me to say what I think I should. As a mere observer, let me tell you that Trix has become Beatrix without changing. She's still a fay, Michael. Since you insist that she have a soul, I'll put it that that soul has never been awakened — unless you've waked it. If she were to love unselfishly once! But I see no difference in her since her return, except the elation that love-making has produced. She could n't be cruel — consciously; but in her blind struggle after her desire — whatever it may come to be — she would cause suffering which the consciously cruel might shrink from. You are a man of strength and will, and you are older than she. Master your wife, if you can — I never could; there's an elusive resilience, a baffling elasticity about Trix that cannot admit of being at fault and will not bear discipline. Come" — he held out his hand and with a gentler accent added, "Don't bear ill-will, Michael, against an old man who's fulfilling an ungracious duty and whose eyes are not glamoured as yours are. You'll marry Trix. God bless you and her — but look after her, not as a wife, but as a child who needs restraint and guidance."

Michael rose, took the outstretched hand and dropped it. "You were never just to Trix, Judge Thorley," he said slowly. "As a boy, you know, I resented your attitude."

"I know how you felt," the old man returned thoughtfully, "I hope with all my soul, *you* will always be."

"Be — just to her!" cried Michael. "Good God — you don't know how dear, how inexpressibly dear, she is to me!"

The old Judge nodded. "Yes," he said, "I think I do. That's why I said it. There is nothing so terrible as one's own injustice to the beloved one — but it exists. And it is tragic."

Patently Michael smiled down at him. He could afford to; the threat of tragic consequences of his injustice to the girl he worshipped was too absurd.

"We're to be married soon," he urged.

"Yes. . . . You're Trix's mate in impulsiveness, I suppose, now?"

He laughed. "Very soon — soon as I can make arrangements for offices in town and a place for us. You would n't have us wait?" His tone was appealing.

Judge Thorley shook his head. "On the contrary. When one gets so near as I am, Michael, to the end of things, it is his impulse to hasten rather than to postpone events in which he may still have a part. That is the other sort of impulsiveness — that of extreme age. It will make my mind easier to know that poor little Trixy is in wise, safe hands. And I think you are wise and safe, Michael. . . . Don't be too much so with Trix," he added quizzically.

CHAPTER VIII

AS THE bridegroom bent toward the mirror to bow his white tie, his eyes lifted from his quick nervous fingers to the face above them. It was the same mirror that had reflected a scowling, boyish face fourteen years before, for Michael had been given his old room at Thorley in which to dress for the ceremony.

And it was much the same face, others might have thought; but to Michael it was another human creature altogether whose confident eyes met his and promised abstention from all things mean and little and weak — a pledge easy to make and easier to keep, it seemed to one so happy, so fortunate as this — promised an active, useful life, broad and kindly, full and magnanimous, to prove his gratitude to Fate that had blessed him so bountifully.

Something of what was stirring his nature so deeply that evening must have lingered in his face and in his voice, for it seemed to the girl in fluttering white who met him on the stairway that the whole bearing of the man was subtly spiritualized, as by a strongly sweet, underlying significance.

She ran up the few steps that separated them, holding out both hands and speaking his name with an intonation caressing and tender. He caught her to him, all the emotion of the hour beating in his heart, but in the quick moment in which she escaped from him his ardour had quieted into that tender affection with which for half his lifetime he had regarded Tessy Thorley. He stooped and kissed her and

laughed at the glow that overswept her face. "What a prude, Sister Tessy!" he cried.

"I thought — I thought that ——" she stammered.

"That I took you for Trix? Well, I did for a second. But I assure you, Miss Therese Thorley, that the kiss I've given you can be positively classified as a proper brotherly embrace. If you doubt, if you have the least fault to find with it, give it back and you shall have another, warranted free from misapprehension."

"Michael," she laughed, keeping his hand, her arm resting lightly on his as they descended the stairs together, "you've become the nicest fellow in the world. How happy we're going to be, and what a dear, dear brother I'm to have."

Michael looked into her smiling eyes. How like she was to the one he loved, after all! The same saucy small features, the alert figure, the voice a-bubble, as he had tried to express it to Trix, with a merry undercurrent that gurgled and chuckled like a brook, knowing secrets it can never share for the lovely low laughter that prevents the telling. But his gold-Trix wore her hair, the lover had noted quickly, in a hundred careless curls, and had a hundred touches of smartness, of that conscious charm in dress that made her frocks seem subtly part of her; and she moved more, much more, like the humming-bird he loved to liken her to than the girl beside him, as though the honeyed essence of life were held in Trix's creamy throat and on her scarlet lips. Old Mrs. Prynne's words came back to him: "You could n't dress 'em alike," she used to say, "you just could n't. They did n't wear the same things in the same way. I'd take two identical slips out of the drawer and dress them and they'd run out to play. But the next moment I saw them there'd

be a determined extra touch on Trix, a ribbon, a flower, an upturning of the sleeves, a down-turning at the throat — how do I know how she did it? But it was done. She was different; she was Trix."

Michael pressed Tessy's hand; was it in vague apology that he could not love her as he did that other? "But you are very late in welcoming your new brother," he said. "Every time I've been down you've been in town, and when I got to town you —"

"Yes," she interrupted, "has n't it been too bad? Anne's been so ill, Anne Gregory. Diphtheria, you know; we always have so much of it out near the Settlement. And of course I took care of her."

"Tessy!" he cried in alarm. "But you're all right?"

"Oh, yes," she smiled up at him. "Anne's is not the first case I've nursed, you know. Then came the quarantine, and we kept it rigidly for the sacred sake of example. But now, oh, Michael, I feel so happy — so happy to-night with Anne well again, and all the ugliness of illness passed, and my dear old Grandad just loving the sight of me after my long absence, and Trixy looking more like a darling fairy than ever under her veil, and — Wait till you see her!"

"I can't!" said Michael under his breath.

She pressed his hand; she loved him for that catch to his voice, and contrasted him with the strong, sure boy-Michael of old who had lived in a rock-bound fastness, it seemed to her as she recalled him, into which he was determined emotion should not penetrate.

"You're so very, very nice, Brother Mike," she whispered.

"Thank you, dear. But there's an unflattering note — surprise is it — behind the compliment. Why should n't

I be nice, if Trix cares for me, or rather — tell me, was I a horrid boy?"

She laughed and he listened with delight; it was so like the laughter to which, he told himself, his heart would dance all his life. And as he listened he had the odd sensation for a moment of looking for the loved one through a disguise, as one familiar with a great artist's technique might note familiar touches through widely differing rôles, as an old master's favourite model may be identified in many a Mary and Magdalen.

"Not horrid," she said, with a grave air of doing justice that immediately shattered his illusion, "but hard — a bit — were n't you? And something of a tyrant, eh?"

He nodded. "And what else?" he urged.

But she would not be pressed to further judgment. "Trix can tell you," she said.

He shook his head smiling. "When Trix and I are together it is not Michael, past, present, or future that we discuss."

She glanced up with quick comprehension, and Michael found himself looking into eyes whose earnestness and candour brought back suddenly the little maid of Thorley whose silent sympathy had watered the barren heart of the boy he had been long ago.

"There should always be one, Michael, to tell us the truth," she said.

"Precisely," he responded merrily, "and you 're exactly the one."

She shook her head. "It is n't a nice rôle — the fault-finder's. I want you to like me, Michael."

He laughed out at this. "You must have terrible things to tell me of myself, Miss Thorley. Well, I give you *carte-*

blanche, now and hereafter. If there's anything your sisterly eye sees amiss, it shall be your privilege as well as your duty to call me to account. Is it a bargain?"

He stopped as he spoke — they had reached the alcove of the library, where the bridal party was to assemble — and held out his hand. She put hers in it and with the other grasped them both. "Oh, Michael, dear Michael," she sobbed, "be very, very tender with her. She's so — dear to me, and I've spoiled her, my Trixy! She is wilful and eager for happiness. She was made for it. But if you love her, Michael, if your love for her is half what mine is, it will teach you patience and gentleness and — and forbearance. See what I'd do for her and she for me, and she must love you more than she does me, for she is going from me to you. She's adorable and sweet and so generous and ——"

"Don't I know?" he protested very gently, bending to say the words, as he opened the door.

"Do you? — do you?" she questioned, her eyes searching his. And then, with a wondering, quivering little laugh, she added, "God love you, I believe you do."

She slipped away, but he had an undefined impression of those low words being a solemn, sweet prelude accompanying him to the threshold of his new life, as well as to the alcove where she left him. Here, chatting with the minister, were Doctor Winslow and Dick Matthewson, the latter with a face of Greek beauty and a stature that overtopped even Judge Thorley's frail, tall figure, bent now, and steadying its feebleness upon Dick's arm. From the drawing room beyond came the nervous, clear voice of Archibald Johns, whose friendship had come to mean much to Michael, and Mrs. Matthewson's purring conversational accompaniment; the gay, light laugh was Mrs. Varney's, of course, and

the noisy exclamations in various timbres belonged to Burke, Willaby, and Morse. The unctuous voice was Willis's, and the giggle Peggy Winslow's. But it was a far-away sort of listening that Michael did, for his heart was chorusing wedding-marches and he could not hear anything else except, now and again, like a bell chiming through them, the blessing faltered in a sisterly voice. So he spoke and listened as in a sort of dream till, at the opening of the door of the Judge's study, he waked and beheld a gay little bride all lace and satin, flashing with smiles beneath her frosty veil, floating rather than walking, her eyes shining and twinkling, her bosom lifting the old Thorley pearls Tessy had knotted about her throat.

To Michael it seemed that all the light in a world of love was centered in that radiant face, when once she turned to him before the little procession moved forward. And she smiled and jested after the ceremony, and took her place at the head of Peter Thorley's table for the wedding supper, with a happy self-possession and a delight in festivity that suggested to Johns (who was something of a poet) the first line of his nuptial hymn; that went to Tessy's head like wine, and intoxicated her with her sister's happiness; that changed Dick Matthewson, grave with the sanctity of abnegation, back for the moment into the playmate she had known; and that lifted half the years that separated them from her husband's shoulders — so boyishly lighthearted, so truly the mate of this glad girl he felt himself that night.

And yet, when it was all over, it was the merriest little bride the wedding party had ever seen who struck the minor note. For she clung about Tessy's neck at the last, sobbing tempestuously and crying, "You ought to come with me, Tessy — you ought, you know you ought! It 'll be your fault if anything

happens, for you ought to be with me—you know you ought!”

It seemed to Tessy a house from which the very life had fled. Without that light and movement which was Beatrice the place had the unnatural stiffness, the forced repose of still-hanging, empty cage, no longer responding to every motion of the vital creature within; or of a fountain dumb and sealed in which the waters no longer play.

After the guests were gone and a few of the more intimate friends put up for the night, Tessy sought her room and Trix's. In the darkness she put out her hand to the empty bed beside hers, touching the pillow upon which the dear head had lain, with caressing fingers. She was so lonely yet it was a loneliness that kept memory throbbing, and three swift scenes, one after the other, upon the sensitive screen of consciousness.

All her life, and all that other life in which her own had been so closely mirrored as to seem an intensifying of experience, an enlargement of personality, passed before her, in the flesh-and-blood vividness with which memory paints her pictures. She felt crippled, bereft, as though Trix in leaving her had somehow left nothing behind.

“You have taken even our childhood away with you, Trixy,” she murmured in a sort of tender communing which took no account of the loved one's absence. “Since you could n't take yours without taking mine, you've got the both, dear, and it leaves me forlorn and — and queerly old.”

But she could n't rest beside that smooth, waiting bed, she rose, and, throwing a gown about her, hurried down the stairs. There would be another who waked, she knew, who, the older he grew, spent nights of increased wakefulness.

as though his wearied senses, straining on ahead to end their long, long service, had knowledge of what lay in the still untravelled road.

"Is it you?" the old man asked, as she opened his door softly. "Can't you sleep, my girl? It has over-excited us both, has n't it?"

She shook her head. "I feel as though I had buried my childhood, Grandfather."

He nodded, reached out his hand and held hers. She took the low chair by the bed and laid her head on the pillow beside him. Many an hour the two had passed like this, "thinking together," as she once phrased it, for ordinarily they spoke little; she, waiting for her soothing presence to dispose him to sleep, he, too weary for speech, and indeed not feeling the need for words to be sensible of communion that comforted and quieted him.

But to-night he knew her to be restless and, though in the semi-obscurity he could not see her clear profile on the pillow beside him, he felt the burden of her thoughts. Yet, with the wisdom of the very old, he waited for a while before he spoke, that the sense of close companionship might come to her with comfort as to him, and that philosophy might come with it.

"For you need it, my girl," he said at length, completing aloud his train of thought.

"What, dear?"

"Philosophy. Patience. The capacity to bear. Fore-knowledge of what Life can do to the one who is out of tune in the great music-drama where each is required to sing; to sing in harmony, sometimes joyously, sometimes sadly, but still to make melody of the material given you, and to shun discord, that tragic discord which comes when one is

rebel at heart and questions the laws of Nature and of God."

She did not open her eyes, but lay there listening to that quiet, thin old voice which so softened the seriousness of his words.

"All because I miss my sister?" she asked finally with a touch of gentle humour, though her voice trembled.

"Partly. But mainly as an indication of temperament, the potential threat that you are, my girl. You take life too seriously. You think too much. You are not temperate. You need to say to yourself, not so much to-night but at future crises: 'This that I am suffering is the common fate. I am not entitled to exemption. That it can be borne is evidenced by the fact that it has been borne, not once, but millions upon millions of times. Therefore I can and must bear it.' . . . It is due, I think, to your twin-ship, the inevitable result of more than one simultaneous birth. Trixy, in taking an undue share of the lightness, the brightness, of things, has robbed you. But you can ——"

"My poor Trixy!" she exclaimed, smiling and patient with his theory, so familiar to her through the years that it had become shorn of harshness. "But in spite of her great crime in being born ——"

"Not of being born — God love the child, poor little Trix!" he exclaimed quietly, "but of being born with you."

"Well, in spite of that, you yourself, my dear old philosopher, are lying awake missing — missing — missing her!"

Her voice rose with its plaint; he pressed her hand and they lay quietly till she was calmer. "Grandfather," she said then, turning her face toward his, "you've been very good to-night."

"Good in the sense of properly conforming, eh, Tess?" he asked quizzically.

"Good, in the sense of being kind," she corrected. "It was dear of you to be so nice to Trix, to let me give her grandmother's pearls, to make so generous a provision for my darling."

"All conscience quieters, my girl," he murmured, and she could fancy the quiet twinkle in the old eyes she could not see. So she said sternly, "Confess, Peter Thorley, confess!"

He laughed under his breath. She was never dearer to him than in this pose of authority. He could remember back through the years when, as a child, she had mothered him seriously, seriously as she did her sister. As she left childhood behind, her sense of humour had given a lighter touch to this quality in her, but as he became very old and neglectful of himself and rebellious of hygiene, that tyrant of the aged, more and more she had reassumed the air of loving domination which had so charmed him in the child.

"I'm a bit afraid of you, Tess, you know," he said whimsically.

"Probably because you deserve to be," she returned, unrelenting. She put his hand to her cheek and held it there, and waited.

It was a few minutes before he spoke. "See, my girl," he said slowly, "we Thorleys have so lived ourselves into this old house that it means more to us than a shelter, more even than a home. Something of all of us who have lived our lives in it must remain when we are gone. I care very, very much for it. It may be an unreasonable sentiment; it is not explainable to those who have n't it. And — Trixy has n't it."

"Grandfather, you don't mean," she began, "you would n't ——"

"I have left the place to my girl," he said simply. "How could I do otherwise, Tess?"

She did not answer. She pressed his fingers to her lips, but they trembled, and she could not speak for a time. "My Trixy!" she murmured at length. "My darling — what could I have that was n't hers?"

"Thorley," he answered gently. And as she shook her head, he repeated it. "Thorley, my girl, the place we both love. I have made it up to Trix, and — she is not a home-builder. If I left the place to her, Tom, Dick, or Harry might own it before ten years had passed; it might even be cut up into town lots, misery me! No, no, Trix is n't the material from which ancestors are fashioned. Do for your sister (she's a Thorley, and your sister), but she is n't a builder of races any more than old Ferrall, the architect, was a real builder of houses. The things he built men and women did not want to live in. . . . I — I want you, you and your children and your children's children, to live here after me."

"Grandfather!" she murmured.

"It is no injustice to your sister, my girl," he insisted. "Can you see Trix, with all your loyalty and devotion to her, can you see Trix a mother, a grandmother?"

"Why — Grandfather!" she protested.

"No — no, be honest. If children come to Trixy — poor little Trixy! — they will be fays like herself, not human creatures; dolls, not creators. If they are not born so, their mother's nature will make them so. . . . Ah, granted, granted," he added, for the quick movement she made warned him that he had wounded her. "But even so. Suppose the coming Trixies to be all your love and pride would wish them, still — still they would not be near to me as yours, my girl." His voice was very low as though he pleaded.

"But, Grandfather," she said softly, and her voice faltered

in the dark, "I may never marry. I — I cannot see myself married, I —"

He broke into a low laugh of amusement. "Ah, my girl, my girl, how little you know yourself! What does Nature make a woman like you for, giving her not only a fine young body but a big, warm heart, a soul quick and sensible, a mind free, clear and sane? Would she waste all that on one Therese Thorley? Is it not a trust fund rather that is handed over to potential motherhood for posterity?" He waited a moment, but she did not speak. "Beware of egotism, Tessy," he added with sly humour, "it is the vice of strong individualities."

She remained silent, confused. He spoke again after a time, but he was becoming very weary.

"Let me please myself in this, in thinking of Thorley as yours," he urged. "And don't," he said, with a soft chuckle, "please don't turn it into a foundlings' home, Tess, till you 're quite sure you won't have foundlings of your own — of our own . . . of our own!" His old voice dwelt tenderly upon the words. "Trixy has all she needs now, even without Michael; he 'll delight in spending for her and she 'll delight in spending for herself. They 'll be happy, we 'll hope. How fortunate it is, after all, that he chose her!"

She would have uttered the loving challenge on her lips, but his voice had become very deliberate and drowsy.

"I 'm glad to have known Trixy's husband," he mused. "If I could know yours, Tess! Perhaps I do, but not as your husband yet. . . . Still, it is not necessary; you could not make an unworthy choice. Don't — don't be too puritan. When the time comes — if I 'm not here — listen to your heart, listen to it, my girl. It will be counselling you as — as I would."

There was something more in his thought, but he was too weary to express it. She pressed his hand, as he murmured a word now and then, and presently his eyes closed. So she heard his light, regular breathing; and she, too, relaxed in her low chair, followed him into the soft, dream-lit obscurity of sleep. But she came back. And he never did.

In the wan light of early morning she saw his thin old face already cold and white on its pillow. And the smiling thought of her with which he had gone to sleep lingered, like an after-blessing, upon his quiet lips.

CHAPTER IX

AS HE himself had informed Michael, his townspeople had much to say of Archibald Johns. What they said varied with the gradated shades of satisfaction or displeasure in such changes as he had been able to accomplish in the city during some active years of political life, and in his threats or promises to do more. People voted Johns a reformer or a demagogue; an altruist, disinterested and public-spirited, or a self-seeking, corrupt politician, an impudent threat to the established, a wrecker of reputations, whom legally acquired wealth and recognized respectability would ultimately quell and punish.

Given this wide divergence of opinion concerning a political free-lance, who rode into the turmoil he created as to a tournament, where he claimed the right to investigate the standing of all vested interests to whose acquirement the slightest suspicion of illegitimacy attached, it was not easy to meet with positive, unbiased information concerning him.

That he was barefoot when, a boy, he came to America; that he owed his education to charity in the first instance, and to the aged philanthropist Rothermel later; that he justified the interest of his benefactor by becoming one of the foremost corporation lawyers of his day, and subsequently took young Rothermel as his partner; that he married Ellen Rothermel when he was thirty-five and his bride some years older, and that when she died childless, within a few years, she left her husband her undivided half-interest in

her grandfather's great estate; that the firm of Johns and Rothermel had been the mightiest association of law-captains a rich man might hire to fight for him, the most redoubtable of opponents, the victors in innumerable battles where millions were at stake; and that, after joining an obscure reform movement which began feebly some years before and perished at the first rude capitalistic breath, Johns had revived it the following winter and, suddenly announcing his determination to be no man's lawyer who was not civically above reproach, and whose case was not equitable according to ethical standards, the attorney virtually relinquished his practice and devoted himself and his fortune to the exposures which had shaken the city: — this was as much as all men could agree upon regarding Archibald Johns.

There were but two articles to his creed. To the first: It is every man's duty to be honest — all men subscribed; with the second: It is every man's duty to mind other people's business when that business is dishonestly conducted — most men differed. But there was an optimistic little company of political nonconformists who believed in him devoutly. Though he was regarded by even the milder exploiting financiers as an impudent spoil-sport, whose sinister motives must be revealed in time, there were men of standing and courage who fought under him and who came to feel for him that intimate reverent affection which is the due of the greater qualities of humanity, but quite compatible with a thorough understanding of the faults that accompany them — a test leadership must meet. Since his return, Michael Thwaites was one of these. A year had passed, and he had familiarized himself with the situation Johns had brought about — a city whose mayor and aldermen still held official position, their corruption a matter of general belief;

a discredited Boss, the link between wealthy bribe-givers and willing bribe-takers; a Commander-in-chief of Industry, Curtis Varney, in whose hands all power-plants in the city were merged, singled out by Johns for his prominence, against whom the whole force of the reform movement was eventually to fling itself; and, to meet political necessities, to appeal to the people against the judgments of biased courts and servile judges, a non-partisan Third Party, whose vigorous growth, despite the combining of plutocratic power against it, evidenced the support of the masses.

"It is becoming more and more a class fight," said Johns to Michael over the telephone, in commenting over a recent showing of hands. "I'm sorry for it, for the Third Party is doomed if it rests on no securer base than Poverty's desire to see dishonest Wealth punished. But what are you going to do when the majority of those who want are honest (even if for 'honest' we must read 'untempted') and the richest of those who have are civic thieves? Now, I don't pretend that should the first become the second their honesty would be more enduring than Curtis Varney's own, but I do say —"

"Hold on — hold on!" Michael shouted his interruption, "is this an address by the renowned Archibald Johns to the United Workingmen, or is it an editorial for —"

"It is neither, you disrespecter of eloquence." Michael's receiver carried a chuckle that underlay Johns's eager voice. "I want to talk, that's all. Can't you come to dinner with me and let a fellow say something?"

"Sorry — no, I can't. I only asked the question," Michael responded, "so that I could gauge the length of your discourse and get home in time. Mrs. Thwaites has a dinner on to-night. If you'll come up and join us —"

"No, thank you," Johns interrupted. "What chance is there to talk at a dinner party?"

"Plenty of chance," laughed Michael, "to talk; not so much to soliloquize. But come up, do. There will be a crowd of gay people from fifty to a hundred years younger than you and me, and after they've gone to the theatre, from which I'm excused, you will have me at your mercy and can then make those few remarks which, unuttered, appear to distress you."

"I'll come," said Johns with decision. "Oh, but tell me," he added, "what will Mrs. Thwaites say to my joining her party to-night without any excuse except that I want to?"

Michael laughed. "Mrs. Thwaites will probably raise her eyebrows one-millionth of an inch; that's as far as she can get 'em. 'Will I have to listen to him?' she'll cry, terrified. 'I can't understand a thing he says.' And I'll reply soothingly, 'He shall be forbidden to speak more than three consecutive words on any topic except vaudeville and the Horse Show till dinner is over and you are all safely out of the way.' . . . How's that, Johns?" he demanded. "Can you do it?"

"I'll try," responded his friend gravely, "if you're sure I won't be upsetting arrangements and Mrs. Thwaites won't hate me for coming."

But Mrs. Thwaites had her own surprise for her husband when he got home.

"Tessy's come, Michael, Tessy's come!" she cried, dancing into his room when she heard his step. "Is n't it lovely of her to get back ahead of time? She left Mrs. Matthewson at Coronado and came on quick, because she got wishing to see me. Is n't it dear of her?"

"It is. I'm very glad," said Michael, bending to kiss her,

as she stood tip-toe before him in an absurd negligée of lace and ribbons, her hair flying about her joyous little face, which she powdered promptly after the marital embrace.

"She 's lying down," Beatrix babbled happily. "I made her just tumble in; she can come down at the last minute. Her trunks have n't come, so she 'll wear my new lace frock. Won't she be lovely?"

"Won't she!" Michael agreed promptly. "And Johns can have her to talk to. Lucky Johns! The night he comes Heaven sends us the only woman of brains we know."

Mrs. Thwaites shot a swift glance at her husband; it pretended to be made up of pique, curiosity, and defiance. "What do we want to know women of brains for?" she asked saucily. "They 're no fun."

"None at all," he admitted gravely. "We want to know ladies of fluff and frivolity, little golden humming-birds who dance all night and twitter all day, and are made up of curls and feathers and flowers and ribbons and all sorts of sweet nonsense." He leaned toward her, but she declined to jeopardize her coiffure.

"And you must n't speak of Tessy that way to men, either," she went on with a pretty, didactic air. "They 'll get to be afraid of her."

Michael was greatly amused. "What men?" he demanded. "You can't frighten Johns that way."

"You 're not going to marry my sister to that old man!" she exclaimed.

"Trix!" Michael's voice broke on his shout of laughter. "I'm not going to marry your sister to anybody, my lady, and neither are you. That 's a matter Miss Tessy will attend to for herself, I fancy. Will Dick be here to-night?"

Beatrix shook her head. "I wanted him to, but you know

how he feels about dinner parties. Some dirty little child somewhere — goodness knows where! — may be hungry. Therefore!" She opened her pink palms explanatorily.

"Dear fellow!" Michael's tone was affectionate. "But wait. He's only a luxury-loving boy to whom privation is luxury because of its novelty. There are no real golden-haired anchorites with lips and eyes like Dick's. Tessy had better watch out; some day he'll break through this elaborate play of platonics they two are engaged in, and marry her before she has a chance to theorize him into self-denial."

"I wonder!" Beatrix mused. "They two would make — a sort of holiness trust, would n't they?" Her eyes twinkled with sunny malice, and Michael grinned appreciatively. "But there's some hope for Dick," she added "for though his father, too, was dreadfully good, his grandfather was called Richard the r——"

"Trix!" her husband interrupted sharply. "We must stop gossiping; it's time we were dressed."

Radiant in soft silks, Beatrix received her husband's friend cordially, even after Johns had humorously repeated Michael's stipulation as to permitted subjects of conversation.

"Well, I *am* afraid of you, you know," she admitted with a laughing upward glance at him. "And I don't approve a bit of Michael's making enemies of all the nice people in town. But, just the same, I'm giving you my dear, dear sister to take in to dinner; she only got back from California this afternoon, quite unexpectedly. So it's exceedingly nice of you to be here to make an even number. . . . Oh, Mr. Johns." She detained him a moment as he was about to go in search of Miss Thorley, and added under her breath, "You can talk sense to Therese; she'll not mind!"

And she turned from him to smile a welcome upon a lisping, short-mustached foreigner, and to give both hands to the lady accompanying him, handsome Mrs. Varney, from whose satin shoulders hung clinging draperies of chiffon and jewelled embroidery; it was an exquisitely sensuous figure, a night-blooming orchid flourishing to perfection under the rays of the electric-light stars.

"Michael's to have the fun of having you next to him, Daisy," said her hostess, "though he does n't deserve it."

"What have you done now, Doctor?" asked Mrs. Varney, turning her melting eyes upon him. "What does Trix mean?"

"Only that no one can possibly deserve such good-fortune I suppose — not even her husband," said Michael gaily.

Mrs. Varney nodded over her shoulder to Beatrix. "Not so bad," she murmured to her friend. "You've taught him, my dear."

"I'm not very proud of him," said Beatrix with a little grimace. "He has views on women of brains — ask him, Daisy, about it."

Mrs. Varney laughed, throwing back her head and displaying a flawless line of throat and bust. "Now Heaven forbid!" she said. "Why in the world, Trixy, should I —" She stopped suddenly, adding with a significant glance at Michael, "She has forgotten us already. Count Max is fascinating, though, don't you think? He was so delighted when Beatrix said I might bring him. He cut the Anixter ball to come."

Michael looked at the gentleman who was bending over his wife's hand with the foreigner's *empresment*. "His face is a bit familiar," he said, as they crossed the library.

"Is it?" she asked, flashing a laughing glance at him.

But all of Mrs. Varney's glances were weighted; sentiment

dwelt in the lustrous depths of her great eyes, and when laughter was born in them it had greater significance than mere mirth, as though it were fed from some hidden spring of delight ordinary women's eyes might not know.

"It's probably a race resemblance," said Michael as she took her chair at the table and he sat beside her. "The Austrian type is rather marked, I think."

She did not answer, but looked eagerly about her. It was a gaily decorated table and a large party that marked Beatrix's first formal entertainment in town. On Michael's left Mrs. Winslow sat, a matron of charm and distinction, to whom Mr. Willis chattered volubly, while his wife and young Willaby, giggling with the exuberance of the ever-young, had their heads together over some bizarre scheme for amusement. Further on, Doctor Winslow was smiling at something Miss Hastings had said — a cynical-lipped, disdainful-eyed young woman of a rather earlier generation. While young Burke and Morton, ignoring their neighbours, sat spell-bound on either hand of Miss Cherry Thorpe, a reckless young athlete, whose browned and freckled face and sun-burned hands seemed hardly to belong to her snowy slender throat and young white arms.

Beatrix had collected a merry company about her, whose high spirits her own challenged. Michael, whom Mrs. Varney kept fully occupied, tried once to attract his wife's attention, but she and the Count Maximilian Thuri were engrossed at that minute, and Mrs. Varney claimed him almost immediately, bending toward him with that air of having something for his ear alone which made her so renowned a *lête-à-lête* artist.

"Who is this unflattering person that gestures so alarmingly on my right," she asked in a merry undertone

MICHAEL THWAITES'S WIFE

"who ignores me so steadily and can't keep his Miss Thorley?"

"I had n't noticed that he was doing either," Michael, amused. "Johns is hardly the ——"

"Not *the* Johns?" Mrs. Varney exclaimed in dismay. "What would my Uncle Curtis say! Far right next to him! It was bad enough when I was coming to your house, Doctor Thwaites," she concluded with a pretty air of terror.

"Mr. Varney would not object to your having freedom of different political persuasion," smilingly suggested

"Oh, but this is n't politics," she put in shrewdly

"You're right, it is n't; it's civil war." He said and as quickly regretted it.

But she passed lightly over it. "I told Uncle Curtis Trix would n't let you go on long in this bad way," she said.

Michael smiled more broadly. "Trix does n't care what I do during the day if I'm ready to play when she comes," he said.

"Does n't she?" In Mrs. Varney's beautiful face was a fleeting hint of mockery. "Is n't she a dear? Uncle Curtis and Aunt Alice are charmed with her; she is bound to make a sensation this winter. Look what she has already to Count Max. He was mad to meet her; he'd heard of her on the other side, you know. I know would tear her eyes out if they could!"

Michael nodded her handsome head, "we've lots and lots of them."

Michael's smile had become grim, but Mrs. Varney apparently did not perceive it. Her eyes were fixed on Johns's broad, outstretched palm — he had an unchangeable habit of gesture, and as he talked emphasized his words with a constant accompaniment of dumb illustrations.

"I can't read that hand," she whispered to Michael, her eye still averted. "How strongly, how oddly it is marked!"

"Yes, what does it say?" he asked, humouring the lady's penchant for palmistry.

"A long life, a hard one," she murmured. "Success in his heart's desire; then failure in his heart's desire."

"Both?" asked Michael humorously.

She nodded gravely. "He will have two; he must have two, and one will fail. That should mean this Third Party, should n't it? I don't know. But what he wants most he shall not have," she added, and turned to Johns with so decided a movement that he faced her, while she sat smilingly regarding him.

"Do you know, Mr. Johns," she said audaciously curling a tapering forefinger on either side of the tiara that crowned her dark braids, "I thought you really had horns."

"Well, you were right — I have," he responded, striving to recall the name by which this particular lady had been called when he was presented to her. "But I wear them — particularly on such occasions as this — on the inside. My hoofs, too," he added whimsically, "are covered by such ordinary leather that none but very beautiful far-seeing eyes can discover them."

"Very good!" she laughed, but her eyes followed his hand. "I wonder," she said impulsively, "if you'd let me look again at the lines of your palm?"

"Again?" he repeated, opening his long, lean hand for her inspection.

"I got just a glimpse of it when you were talking," she explained, bending inquisitively over his hand.

"Mrs. Varney's a celebrated palmist, you know, Johns," said Michael leaning forward.

Struck by the name, Johns regarded her curiously. She, too, looked up and their eyes met. "I wish," she said eagerly, "I knew what is the thing you want most on earth."

"Would Mr. Curtis Varney's niece give it to me?" he asked, amused.

She shook her head. "But I wish I knew," she repeated.

"So do I," he said gravely.

"You don't know?" she demanded quickly.

"I did know," he answered still serious.

"How long ago?" she persisted.

Johns turned to his neighbour. "How long ago was it, Miss Thorley," he asked, with his rare smile, "that I knew what I wanted? Mrs. Varney wants to know."

"Just about thirty seconds ago, I should say, Mrs. Varney," said Tessy, nodding across to Trix's friend.

"And what was it?" Mrs. Varney asked eagerly.

"It was a prayer that politics might become a gentlemanly sport — was n't it?" She looked up to Johns for confirmation.

"Pshaw!" petulantly exclaimed Mrs. Varney.

"No, truly," laughed Tessy, "we were wishing that the time would come when college men, for instance, would take as much interest in governing their country as they do now in — football, say."

"What nonsense are you talking, Therese Thorley?" called Beatrix from across the table.

"I'm not," said Tessy stoutly. "I'm saying only that the gentleman who engages in politics is looked upon as a freak by his class, unless he has a sordid axe to grind or a selfish ambition to gratify; these justify his eccentricity in their eyes. But a cultivated, well-to-do, well-bred human being, making a study of social conditions with the object of bettering the

political machinery with which our government handles the common problems of living — such a man, giving his heart and his mind and his time to the work (even as Wavy-eared Brocato and Shorty Tracy do, for vicious reasons, out at our Settlement) — do you know of such an instance, and if you did would n't you suspect this man of socialism or anarchism, or of some unbalanced desire for notoriety, which, in itself, is evidence that he is not representative of his class?"

"We would — we would!" cried young Willaby, who always answered oratorical questions.

Miss Thorley grimaced across at him, but she continued: "Once," she said, more lightly, "I was arguing with Shorty Tracy, who keeps the nearest saloon in our district. 'Mr. Tracy,' I said indignantly, 'the man who is free from selfish motive you cannot bully, you cannot buy, you cannot bribe!' He looked out of his little pig eyes at me. 'Aw,' he said, '~~a~~ angel! We'd tire him to death; just naturally wear him out — 'Not if there were many of him,' I cried. 'But they ain't —' he said with a grin. 'They crop up every now and then, but they go down again. *We* last. We're in the game to stay nothin' of the one-night-stand about folks like me and Wavy. You're a sensible girl, Miss T'orley, don't you let 'em fool ye.'"

"Hear! Hear!" cried Burke and Morton, drumming enthusiastically upon the table.

"Are n't they rude, bad boys?" laughed Tessy appealing to the company, "and does n't their impertinent frivolity prove my point?"

"What is it, Miss, if I may ask — what is it, your point?" Count Maximilian, for the first time since he had taken his seat beside his hostess, became interested in someone else

as he looked over at Miss Thorley's piquant face, alight with excitement.

"Simply this, Count Thuri," Tessy returned quickly. "It's not exactly good form in America to be a politician. Fancy that — ought n't we be ashamed of it! The one occupation in life which is really 'man's work' (as that phrase goes, meaning merely the biggest, best thing on earth) is not fit for a gentleman! Oh yes, men vote and, in a dilettante, amateurish way, are interested in the vital problems of government, of life, but. . . . 'Me and the Wavy-eared run t'ings,' Shorty Tracy, the saloon-keeper, says calmly. And he's right; he does, he and men like him."

She had spoken with vivacity and spirit, and Count Maximilian clapped his hands softly, as at some performance that pleased him. "So! And why do you, Miss Thorley, why do you not vote to remedy this? Ladies vote in America, do they not?" he asked, amused.

"They do," admitted Miss Thorley, "and they don't. But they don't in this part of America, Count Thuri. Oh, do you suppose, if I could vote," she went on eagerly, "I'd be washing unattached babies and nursing old Mrs. Inglis, and cooking Henry Vickers's dinner when his wife won't come home? Not I. There'll always be 'good ones' and bad ones, too, to do all of this. No, I'd dress myself in silk attire and ostentatiously fold about me the prestige of all the Thorleys, and give myself the benefit of every irrelevant influence that money and position seem to mean to the uitlander. Then, hey for Shorty Tracy's, there to battle with him for decency and honesty and fair play. He'd have some respect for me, would Shorty, if I were gowned to emphasize caste. For this rig — oh, I thought I had on my nurse's uniform!" she cried, smiling at herself in all the bravery of

lace and jewels. "For the nurse's gown he has n't even patience; it's a sort of play-acting to him; he does n't believe in it. . . . But seriously, there could n't be thievery and injustice if the heart of the Law, which is the common conscience beating into words, were not stifled and outwitted and corrupted, could there?" Involuntarily she had turned from the Austrian to appeal to Michael and to Johns. "The best there is, is none too good for such work — is not good enough, is it?"

"No, you're right — you're right. My compliments, Miss Thorley!" cried Michael, laughingly bowing toward her. "Tessy's right, Trix," he added.

Trix laughed. "Of course," she said, "Tessy's always right; she always has been. There's nothing novel about that. It must get to be a bore," she added with a dainty air of disdain, "to be so uniformly and invariably and monotonously right!"

"You wicked girl!" challenged Tessy, shaking her fist across at her sister. "And to think that once I actually dreamed I was you! It was in delirium, to be sure, and I was only a child but —"

"It must have been a lively kind of dream, though, Tess," chuckled Trix. "Frankly, now, were you ever so alive while awake as you were that time asleep?"

"Alive!" repeated Tessy, "I was n't alive, I was intoxicated. Fancy what it must be to be really Trix, if a diluted dream consciousness of identity so alarms and excites one!"

"Pouf!" exclaimed Trix. "If I should ever dream myself Tessy, I know I'd never wake."

"So delightful the change, so enjoyable the novelty of inner peace and order and calm good sense?" Tessy questioned placidly.

"Hardly. I'd simply never wake because, being so sound asleep, I just would n't have life enough to come to myself," responded Trix with a gurgle of laughter.

"You really must have to be an awfully 'good one' at the Settlement, Miss Thorley," put in Mrs. Varney. She took a cigarette from the butler and, after lighting it, drew in one deep breath of smoke before she passed it to Michael. He took it with a smile and put it to his lips. But his teeth closed upon it with a snap; across from him, between Count Thuri and Trix, who had risen, the same little play of coquetry was taking place.

Tessy spoke quickly. "That's cruel, Mrs. Varney," she said humorously. "The Settlement is the one place where I have n't got to live up to that fatal reputation for holiness Mrs. Prynne gave me when I was too little and feeble to protest. Nobody knows I'm the 'good one' out yonder; if they did they'd have nothing to do with me. I'm useful, I'm there, I'm not a 'quitter' — there's the extent of adjectiving I get at the Settlement; but I never once have been accused of being good."

Mrs. Varney had risen, too; in the lucent depths of her eyes there was mocking laughter. "I know, though," she said softly over her shoulder, as she followed Beatrix into the other room, "that you're too holy to smoke."

"Cigarettes?" asked Tessy. "Yes, I think I am. If ever I take to it, I shall want a pipe — a dirty, snubby, little old pipe like Shorty Tracy's. The comfort and joy and counsel he gets out of it! I'll have one, too, when I go into politics."

"Somehow, Miss Thorley," said Johns, detaining her a moment, "somehow, I don't see you with the pipe — or the politics."

"But you do see, don't you," she asked, meeting cordially his evident interest in her, "what an un-live-downable reputation I've got. And it is so undeserved," she mourned laughingly as she hurried away to join the blithe party bound for the theatre.

Michael and his friend came back to a snug, quiet smoking-room where they sat and chatted fitfully. But the host was preoccupied, and into Archibald Johns's tense, one-ideal life a new and stirring emotion was crying for admittance. They separated early and Michael, left at last to himself, lit his pipe and began to pace the room, to set his unquiet impressions in order.

After a year of marriage, his wife was still the brightness of life to him, his golden humming-bird, youth incarnate, a creature to covet, to borrow freely from of the exhaustless store of wild gayety that was hers; a woman to love passionately, adoringly, but never to rest on, to build with; never a wife to reach out her hand and bid one climb and make each height a stepping-stone.

"It's your own fault." He recalled her pretty light voice, childishly resentful but unangered, when once he had remonstrated. "You can't say, you can't honestly say, Michael Thwaites, that when you made love to me you had ever a thought of the high and holy lady you're talking of now."

He remembered to-night; remembered, too, that he could not deny what she had said, yet had still too much reverence for her to admit.

"What in the world did you marry me for, Black Michael?" she demanded then of his silence.

"Because I could n't help it," he answered.

She smiled comprehendingly, forgivingly. "Don't be silly then," she said, and had kissed him lightly as she left him.

And so, with an aching sense of the injustice of his demand from her of more than was in her, he had set himself to make all that he could of what she had to give. It was much: pretty girlish affection, a blithe delight in his interest in everything that pleased herself, a lightly dutiful pretence of comprehending and sharing in his plans, and a uniformly charming lightheartedness, as though the sun of happiness, instinctively seeking out this leading lady of insouciance, kept his rays enchantingly upon her, so that wherever she walked there was light.

It was a bright, joyous kind of light, but it had no warmth. Michael Thwaites was a man of some gravity and experience; now that he was married he was in love with the wife to be, while his wife was in love with the lover he had been — and still tried to be to please her. Gaily and resolutely she ignored all that in his character which she intuitively felt to be incongruous with herself. He waited for the child in her to become woman. Each was to some extent conscious of the other's attitude; both were strong and confident, and neither was possessed of the transforming imagination, of that acutely tender sympathy which can realize without actual experience, and see behind the mask of sex and temperament into the simple depths of humanity's soul.

But as Michael walked the floor that night and waited for her, his mood was gracious and his thoughts were gentle. She was so young, so very like a little girl, this wife of his, so genuinely uncomprehending of a point of view that could menace any pleasure of hers, so single-idead in her desire for diversion, that it was not so surprising she should regard as unwarranted and unkind any interpretation that lessened or hindered her opportunities.

And yet, how far should Wisdom humour this fascinating child? And how long must it be before he should have a companion to live with, not a headstrong, pleasure-mad girl of whom he was guardian? Michael stopped in his walk to lean upon the mantel. His pipe was out and mechanically he tapped it upon the warm bricks as he looked down into the glowing coals — all the light he had left in the room. Far into the future he tried to search for the picture men's eyes love to rest upon. But even in his reverie he smiled at himself; how should one fit conventional race-dreams to so individual a figure as Beatrix? True, Nature's power has compelled most of humanity, however refractory, to run in this one mould; but, as if in her own despite, she sometimes creates rebellion, embodying it in beauty, spirit, and grace, as though to make it worth her while to contest its battle against her own Draconian laws.

But who would associate rigidity of rule and the logic of penalties with this joyous young creature sweeping into the lighted hall even now, her satin cloak with its long fringe falling from bare shoulders, her spirited little head held high, a charm and airy grace about her every movement that bewitched her husband anew as he watched her, and recalled to him that night aboard ship when consciousness of her own beauty and its effect upon him had set her every fascination at work to make her more exquisitely desirable?

He started forward and was about to speak to her, but she was bidding good-night to Tessy, who ran quickly up the stairs; and it was only in the moment that Count Thuri bent over his wife's hand with an air of gallantry, as they turned toward the smoking-room, that Michael became aware of his presence; disagreeably aware, for, in the second before

he spoke, his mind subconsciously seeking authorization for a vague antipathy, had called up a hot evening more than a year before in Vienna, the brilliantly lighted gardens, and the young Austrian officer with a clipped mustache and bold, laughing eyes, in pursuit of a girl in tan.

"If you will light one little cigarette for me, Madame" — it was the same thick-tongued voice; Michael wondered that he had not recognized it at once — "one little cigarette, as you most graciously did at dinner —"

Michael's voice broke harshly on the young officer's sentimental falsetto. "Good-evening, Count Thuri," he said, as he turned on the lights in the smoking-room.

"Ah, good-evening, good-evening Doctor."

The young man held out his hand, but with no pretense whatever Michael passed him and busied himself in taking the wrap from Beatrix's shoulders.

Count Maximilian turned to his hostess with an almost imperceptible lifting of his ruddy brows. "On second thoughts, Madame," he said, "I have already smoked too much. Good-night and a thousand thanks for your gracious kindness."

As soon as the door had closed after him Beatrix hurried to Michael, and stood watchfully regarding him. "Are you going to be nasty again?" she demanded.

The absurdity of the question and the beauty of her as she stood, a tiny thing all life and fire in her wrath, came to him at once, appealing to his sense of humour and his sensuous delight in her.

"Are you going to be nice?" he asked in his turn, laughter in his voice and in his eyes.

She looked at him, puzzled. Good humour was so preferable to heroics, and she had been sure the note he would strike would be harshly critical.

"Why — why did you treat him so?" she asked.

He did not answer immediately. He took her hand in both of his and began pulling off her long gloves, an occupation he delighted in, so pretty and round and young was the delicately modeled arm beneath, which he might kiss as a reward for his services.

"Tell me, Michael," she repeated peremptorily.

"I don't like him, dear," he said simply. "I don't like men with that manner near my wife, and ——"

"And?" she prompted.

"And I don't like my wife to take a cigarette from her lips and give it to a man to smoke."

"But you took the cigarette Daisy Varney lit for you."

He smiled. "Mrs. Varney's not my wife."

A flush of anger mounted to Trix's face. "If she were ——" she began hotly.

"If she were," Michael interrupted quizzically, "I'd as lief she'd light a cigarette that way for me — but not for any other man; certainly not for Count Thuri."

"If she were" — with a quick movement she withdrew from him, pulling off her gloves with a tempestuousness that warned him — "she'd show you how she'd treat your friends when you were rude to hers."

"Trixy!" It was more an appeal than an exclamation.

But she swept away from him, gathered her cloak on her arm, and hurried toward the stairway. He followed, laying a detaining hand gently upon hers.

"This fellow's not your friend, Trix," he said.

"Oh, what's the use of quibbling!" she cried. "He is. He will be my friend if I like."

"But you won't like, Trix."

"Do you mean ——" She faced him suddenly, her eyes searching his.

"Oh, nothing," he said deprecatingly, "except that you can't like that kind of fellow. You can't — not because of me, but because of you. Don't you understand?"

"Oh, I understand!" She shrugged her slender shoulders with the air of one who is intolerably burdened. "You're going to preach again and be tiresome. Why can't you be like other men? Or, if you can't, why won't you let me be myself? I won't be a horrid, stupid, dull old married woman. I won't! You knew I would n't when you married me."

Almost in spite of himself, he smiled; she was so petulantly childish.

"Whom do you want me to be like, Trix — Charlie Willis, empty-headed, light-footed young Willaby, which of them?"

"I don't want you to be like that old bore of a Mr. Johns," she retorted. "Count Max brought letters to everybody in town that's anybody. On the motor ride we're going to take to-morrow Mrs. Anixter herself is coming. She's sixty, you know, and holy as — as you'd like your wife to be. You'll see Mrs. Anixter herself in the Count's car," she added a bit more uncertainly.

"But not Mrs. Thwaites," he said slowly.

She looked down at him — she had stopped on the stairs — her little scarlet mouth was set and her eyes were ablaze.

"He's the same young blackguard, Trix, that I ought to have knocked down that night in Vienna," Michael said after a pause.

"Why did n't you?" she asked.

"You don't mean to say you knew!"

"Knew!" she repeated. "Of course I knew. What do you suppose kept us talking all through dinner? He —

apologized very nicely. He 'd been drinking, you know, that night," she added.

Michael did not speak.

She waited a moment and then, on an impulse, she bent over and laid a soft arm about his shoulders, tipping his head back with a gentle tug at his thick hair and punctuating her discourse with caresses light as rose leaves.

"Do be a dear, nice, amiable Black Mike!" she murmured. "What 's the good of scowling at your wife, sir? I 'm going up to Tessy for a bit of a chat. She ——"

"Is Tessy going with you to-morrow?" he demanded.

She stiffened. "No. Tessy 's not; she 's got to get back to the Settlement, she says. Good-night." She turned and went up the stairs.

Below on the first landing he called softly to her. "Don't go to-morrow, Trix," he begged.

"I must," she said in her bird-like way, pausing to look over the banisters at him. "I promised."

"Break your promise," he urged, and ran up after her. She shook her head.

"Please!" He tried to take her in his arms, but she drew away from him.

"What 's the use?" she asked coldly. "You 'd make as much fuss the next time he 'd ask me."

"There 's to be no next time," he said with sharp impatience.

"But there will be, of course," she said, with childish pertinacity, so bent upon her wish that she failed to grasp the significance of his assertion. "Do you suppose a man stops asking you to go places just because you say 'no' once?"

"Not that kind of man," he answered steadily. "But you 'll say 'no' so often that even he will understand."

She turned quickly to look at him, and his determined eyes met hers. She had never seen those eyes like that; no matter how weary, how vexed, how sombre they might be, they never failed to shine for her; they needed but her presence to kindle; her least word could set them aglow. A sob shook her. "You'll make me hate you, Michael Thwaites!" she cried and, hurrying up the stairs, she shut the door of her sister's room between them.

CHAPTER X

THE Laura Whitaker Settlement, though its founder has been dead many years, is still characterized by the sincere and practical benevolence in which it had its origin. It is destitute of rules and regulations; it is rich in clients who have been won away from suspicion by years of patience, good breeding, and quiet, helpful human sympathy.

The people who live in direst poverty about it have become convinced that it demands nothing of them openly or indirectly, and that it has but one function — to give. In order to merit assistance, they are not required to mortgage their souls, their conduct, their speech, nor their reputations; they need not be saints nor hypocrites nor sycophants; they may continue to be quite the same individuals in every respect, and yet receive aid as though legally entitled to it.

In this neighbourhood, which is known as "Hell's Panhandle," they have had considerable experience of the "charity confidence game," as one Shorty Tracy expressed it to his new confidant, Miss Thorley; but they have decided, as experts, that at No. 17 Panhandle Place there is help in time of stress where, to quote the gentleman above mentioned, "the little lady herself, the big one, and the Rev.-Dick hand it out an' no string tied to it."

The "Rev.-Dick" was not a title invented by Tracy. The abbreviation, which had as little disrespect as reverence in it, had become current in the boys' club founded by Richard Matthewson in connection with the Settlement when only

a boy himself. It was a curious and pathetic fact, though, that as Dick progressed along the path he had chosen, he became more and more reluctant to follow it. While his mother lived, her pride and satisfaction in him upheld him, but after her death personal humility superseded religious exaltation; and though he had too much reverence for the sanctified prefix formally to discard it, Dick slipped back into the ranks of the laity.

"I had n't the impudence to do at twenty-two what I had coolly contemplated at sixteen," he said once to Tessy Thorley. "I mistook humanitarianism for religion; I still have the one. I'm afraid I never really had the other."

Nothing remained of the years of passionate profession but the odd diminutive which his boys used; with a sneer at first, in the early stages of affiliation with his club, and with an intimation that members must ultimately pay for accepted favours the price clerical gentlemen sooner or later exact. But when his critics fell down in worship — and what lad could help loving him for his strength, his abounding masculine beauty, and the frank, sunny boyishness that made them comrades? — the "Rev.-Dick" became the sort of nickname loving families create and cherish, as the years make them more and more significantly tender.

"It's another sort of ordination you've won here, Dick," Tessy Thorley said to him when he finally brought into the fold a debased, mocking little cripple who had long eluded them. "If you never were truly consecrated before, you would be now by the rescue of poor little limpety Jim."

At her words the quick colour flooded Dick's face. "What a perfectly beautiful blush!" laughed Tessy; and he laughed with her, which restored the serene and comfortably

common-place good-fellowship in which they lived at No. 17 Panhandle Place.

But the next day the same Tessy sat at the table, looking indifferently from under heavy lids at the supper Miss Gregory had placed before her. She had been up all night, and Death, no unusual visitor, had called at the little hospital in the morning. Since then she had slept, but waked unreconciled and unhappy.

"You 're so good, Anne," she said, with a trembling smile, "you 're so good to bother, but I 'm not hungry."

Miss Gregory smiled at once deprecatingly and encouragingly. Partly because of the disparity in their years, partly perhaps because of her friend's diminutive proportions and her own gracious amplitude, but mainly for the sheer pleasure Anne took in mothering, Therese Thorley's life at the Settlement was more warmly sheltered and had more of the element of loving feminine watchfulness than she had ever experienced.

"You 'll just try to eat, dear," coaxed Miss Gregory, hovering about the table. "You know you 've not been very philosophical about this case. It is n't a bit sensible, dear, and you 've worked so hard; you 've just kept Jennie alive these twenty-four hours. Nothing but you did it."

"The poor girl!" Tessy sighed. "She begged so hard to be kept here till she could put her baby in Joe Brocato's hands and ask his forgiveness and his care for the child. But I could n't do it. I do think, though, she knew how hard I was trying."

"Of course she did." Anne's voice was warm with comfort. "But, Tessy, perhaps it 's as well, after all."

Tessy set down her teacup. "You think, Anne, that even after this she could n't, she would n't ——"

"She could n't, dear. That 's what I 'm afraid of; she could n't keep to Joe Brocato. She was bound to go wrong. These poor Jennie Brocatos! . . . Come, have another cup of tea."

Tessy shook her head. "He ought to be here by this, if he 's coming — Brocato," she said slowly.

"Yes," said Anne, " he is."

"Oh!" Tessy rose quickly. "You 've seen him — told him?"

Anne nodded, putting her hands on her friend's shoulders and pressing her gently back into her chair. "He 's upstairs now," she said. "I let him go up alone. His friend Tracy came with him. He wants to see you."

In spite of the depression that weighed upon her, a smile came to Tessy Thorley's lips. He was such a delight to her, this Shorty Tracy, with his amazing seriousness as to himself, and his conviction that the rest of the world could but be taken humorously; with his astounding moral obliquity and unswerving adherence to his own code; with his good-humoured patience with honour and righteousness as useful and perhaps necessary poses, since certain games were to be played and won; and his faithfulness to friends and retainers, to which latter class Joe Brocato, a waiter in an up-town café, belonged.

"He 's the best man I 've got, Miss T'orley," he said, seating himself at a respectful distance from her table, yet assuming an unconstrained attitude that evidenced his confidence in his hostess. "I 'm sure sorry for the Wavy-eared."

Tessy never heard the sobriquet without a smile; it was so descriptive of the large, irregular additions with which Nature had winged Brocato's low-browed head. But Tracy, for whom the nickname had superseded any other designation

of this particular follower of his, went soberly on. "You 've been mighty good to the girl, Miss T'orley; an' you can count on me an' Wavy."

She smiled over at him. "What would you two do for me, Mr. Tracy?"

He looked at her, his shrewd eyes and cynical lips smiling back at her, with an appreciation of her point of view that was half the unaccountable tie between them. "Well, Miss," he said slowly, "you can send to the saloon for all the dope you need — A-1 whiskey, you know."

She shook her head. "The Settlement's well enough endowed, you know," she said, whimsically lending herself to the encounter.

"An' you don't need Tracy whiskey? Well, have Shorty Tracy's goodwill, Ma'am," he said genially. "Many 's the politician wants it."

"Thank you, I will." Her face was alight now with amusement; Tracy said to himself it was the jolliest little face in the world, and his own spirits rose with content in having driven the shadows from it.

"An' if ever you 're sure up against it," — Tracy rose, his bulky little body responding to rippling chuckles of enjoyment of his own humour — "an you 've got to get your man, me an' the Wavy-eared 'll attend to the job for you. You need n't bother about dee-tails; Wavy may be short on lots of things, but he 's long on gratitude. You 've got Joe for life all right. He 'll look up the best way an', some day, Miss T'orley, said gent's best friends — the gent you ain't got no use for — will attend his funeral and wonder at the neatness of the job. An' it shan't cost you a cent!"

But Miss Thorley was staring at him. Part of the way that was this man's way of thought she could go, impelled by

a large sympathy and the charity of inexperience, and compelled to admiration by the fellow's quick common sense, his freedom from cant or cowardice. But though Mr. Tracy was accustomed to speak freely to the few people he trusted, Tessy Thorley held her breath when she thought she comprehended. "I don't believe ——" she began. "You — you 're ——"

"Guying you?" interrupted Tracy with a large smile, "'Course I am. Did n't know I could get a rise from *you* so easy." There was an accent of disappointment, of reproach, that was intended to humiliate one who showed such credulity. "But somebody's got to stuff ballot-boxes and pull off political jobs, an' there 's got to be somebody to do the dirty work, since there 's dirty work to do. The world could n't get on without me an' Wavy an' — though you might n't think it, lookin' at him — there 's more sense, *for* our business, you understand, behind them wavy ears of Brocato's than you can imagine. That 's all, Miss," he added soothingly. "Nothin' more 'n that; don't *you* worry."

Tracy rose, and at that minute the door opened, and Miss Gregory came in followed by a great, shambling fellow who held his hat helplessly in both hands and looked out into the world from small, suspicious eyes, just now clouded with suffering.

"I been talkin' for you, Wavy, to Miss T'orley," said Tracy with the air of a man of the world who comes readily to the rescue of diffidence. "It 's all right. She understands just how t'ankful you are." He winked darkly at Tessy. "An' it 'll be all right about the funeral and the kid; it 's all on Tracy's, an' I guess the saloon can stand it. . . . The Wavy-eared is my best hand, ma'am," he continued

explanatorily to Miss Gregory. "He ain't got much head, but Joe's no fool either." He laid a fat hand upon Brocato's shoulder, and the Sicilian shot a quick glance sidewise at him as though to test the quality of the humour that he felt obscurely behind the compliment, "for he's got sense enough to *know* he ain't got any. So he never tries to do much head-work; he just comes to me to do his thinkin' for him, an' I go to him when I want somethin' well done. It works fine," he concluded with a heartiness and satisfaction in voice and manner so genuine that Tessy found it difficult to withhold congratulations. "About this poor little body upstairs," he threw his chin up to designate the room above where Brocato's dead wife lay, "Wavy's sorry — that's all. He throws her out o' doors when he finds how things are goin', but he wishes he had n't. You can't blame Joe; he was sure hot an' he had a right to be; but just the same he's mighty glad you ladies took Jennie in, an' you can count on him to the limit, an' so good-day an' much obliged; send bills to Tracy's, an' if there's anything in our line, mine an' Wavy's, or out of it, just squeal."

Miss Thorley promptly did, but it was at sight of Beatrix coming across the hall, and her cry was one of delight. Tracy was backing out of the room — the dumbly eloquent Brocato had preceded him — when he, too, caught sight of the lady. For a moment he looked bewildered from one sister to the other; then, shaking his head, he ejaculated, "Holy Smoke, what an alibi!" and took his leave.

She had come to stay, declared Beatrix, and she had n't brought her trunk, nor indeed anything but Fujiyama, her sleeve dog, and what she had on — the gown of lace Tessy had worn once, whose graceful train swept down beyond the automobile coat that covered Trix from throat to heels.

She intended, she said, with her light-hearted laugh, to wear Tessy's very prettiest and smartest blue linens, with those fascinating nurses' aprons and bewitching caps; she was glad Tess had never earned the right to full-fledged white, for she loved the blue. It was jolly, she said, to have a wardrobe at both ends of town; she did not know that she should ever leave them.

"But first," she cried, "we'll go for a spin in the auto, and when I do come back I'll change my clothes and be Saint Tessy."

"You'll have to change more than clothes, Trixy Thwaites," called Tessy, as she hurried into her room to make ready for the drive.

"Not I," laughed Trix from the sitting-room. "You'll take your wings off and fold them neatly before laying them on your dressing-table, and I'll slip 'em on first thing in the morning, that's all. Only —"

The rest of her blithe little speech was lost to Tessy, for on the table before her lay a letter which she remembered having left unopened upon a sudden summons to the hospital ward. She opened it now, with a sudden understanding of Trix's impromptu visit and a sick anticipation of what Michael, whose handwriting she recognized, must have to say.

"I'm not complaining again of Trix to you, dear" [he wrote]. "I'm complaining rather of Michael Thwaites; at times he does n't seem to be able to keep his word to you. He is convinced that all his wife needs is patience and time and a judicious bit of eye-closing on small transgressions. And you'd think, would n't you, that, feeling this so strongly, a man might keep his temper and hold his tongue, and wait — wait? But instead, the old black devil in him gets

to magnifying things — at least, shows them in their worst light, and rouses him to unworthy thoughts and unpleasant words. And then ——!

“More and more Johns’s plans and hopes seem to bind me up with them; with my own work — and I have spent an incredible number of hours in the operating-room this week — I have n’t the time to be patient and wise, and I ought to be both. I have to speak at a meeting to-night for Johns, whose voice has given out; I should be writing my address now instead of whining to you. Bear with me, sister Tessy, and help me a bit, won’t you, by being part guardian to the girl we both love so dearly, and forgive me for putting my burden on you. Trix speaks occasionally of going to you; if she does, perhaps it would be as well till the stress of my work is past — or can’t you come to us a bit? We need you so very much. Be a Thwaites Settlement angel, and come to cure our sick tempers, won’t you?”

The face that Tessy saw in the glass, as mechanically she looked into it and tied her veil, had gone white. She had known and yet had refused to admit the threat of unhappiness that hung over them. Michael’s first note some weeks before, in which he had begged her to accompany Trix on Count Thuri’s motoring party, had been more guarded, and neither of them had alluded, when they met, to his plea for help and her immediate response. But this was different, this open admission of differences; it seemed to knell the end of peace. What could she do! Lost in sorrowful regret, she stood pondering and perplexed till Trix’s voice roused her. “Tessy — Tessy!” she cried, appearing at the door, “angels don’t prink.”

But Tessy was beyond the challenge in that blithe voice. "My Trixy," she said, her arms about her. "My darling Trixy!"

Beatrix looked keenly at her. "You're too pale, Tessy," she murmured fondly. "I shan't let you work so hard. Come, the air will do you good."

Tessy was glad that Miss Gregory had decided not to accompany them. She sat back in the car close to Trix, while they were hurried up the drive, contentedly taking deep breaths of air, her apprehension quieted by the placidity of Beatrix's glowing face and her light chatter.

"But don't you ever get married, Tess," she said sagely, as she finished a recital of gayeties in which she had recently taken part. "Husbands never know how to mind their own affairs. They're forever telling you what you shall and what you shall not do. Fancy! I've had to battle for every bit of pleasure I've had these past two weeks. . . . That's why I came to you. I'm going to stay until Michael Thwaites has his senses back or gets out of politics. Then perhaps he'll take some time to amuse me, and not expect me to stay at home from things just because he can't go with me." She sat up in her furs, a bit of matronly dignity, with a pouting assumption of displeasure that was piquantly attractive. "Or because he disapproves," she added carelessly.

Tessy turned and faced her. "Trixy," she began.

But Beatrix caught her hands. "Tessy," she said quickly, "you're not ever going to scold me, too!"

Tessy pressed the fingers that held hers. Scold, how could she? This other self, this light and joyous self, that had never a care, untouched of conscience, unhampered by second thoughts, unhindered by threat of consequences

—how could she dull by disapproval the light of that bright other face of hers, the gay obverse of her own, the part of herself that was turned toward the sunshine of life and caught all of its warmth and color, the being that was and was not herself as one's dream of oneself is not real and yet is more true to one's inner self than the waking one! Something of her very own nature must be dulled and clipped and bridled if this sweet wildness that was Beatrix were tamed.

And yet — fear came over her; fear for the future toward which the merry little bark sailed so lightly, so heedlessly, while the horizon grew black and blacker and took the likeness of Michael Thwaites's strong, dark face, grim with resolution and heavy with sorrow.

"You have n't gone to places he's forbidden, Trix?" she pleaded.

"Forbidden! I like that!" The aigrettes on Beatrix's fur hat tossed haughtily. "I have, Tessy! I have gone to a ball at the Varney's where I danced half the night with Count Max Thuri, and to a sleighing party he gave, and to the theatre with Daisy Varney and him — and all without the sacred approval of my lord Dr. Michael Thwaites, poky old surgeon, pokier politician, and friend of that pokiest political scandalmonger (as Mr. Varney called him), Archibald Johns."

"Oh, honey," grieved Tessy, "why did you go?"

"He told me not to," said Trix tersely.

"But Trixy — if he had n't forbidden it —"

"Oh, yes," interrupted Trix serenely, "I'd have gone, too. I" — she cried out sharply — "I wanted to go."

There was a silence. Tessy looked out over the ice-choked river. Her understanding of this girl beside her

was so complete, so lovingly sympathetic, how could she ask her to be less herself? She turned to her suddenly, but before she could speak Beatrix was cuddling close to her, her voice sweet with affection. "Don't you open your eyes at me, Tessy Thorley. They're red, what have you been doing to yourself now?" she cried, lightly patting them closed. "Married people always quarrel, you silly!" she added comfortingly, her arm in Tessy's.

"No, Trix, no!" cried her sister.

"Yes, yes. What do you know about it, Miss?" retorted Beatrix. "The Curtis Varneys have been on the verge of divorce for the past three years, have n't they?"

"And why?" demanded Tessy.

"Think I'm going to tell you, you baby?" said Trix.

"Oh, Trixy! I'm a baby, am I? And the child I helped to bring into the world this morning, poor little Jennie Brocato's baby! The mother died before she saw it."

Trix had her fingers in her ears. "Don't — don't tell about those awful things, Tessy," she begged. "Take this for the baby," and she pressed her purse into Tessy's hand. "Ugh! you ought not to stay in that place, it's black with tragedy. One can't laugh or sing or even breathe there! There's only one bit of sunshine in the place, and that's shining square on Dick Matthewson's bonny head. Has n't he grown to be the most beautiful thing on earth, Tess?" Her voice was warm with satisfaction, with pleasure. She had glided away from the sombre topic with a transition as imperceptible as it was swift. "I caught sight of him yesterday walking across the park with all his boys bound for the museum. He looked a — a god-like young Pied Piper with all those little rats dancing to his music. Who would n't dance?"

Tessy Thorley, if Dick Matthewson had ever piped to me I'd have followed him if every . . . Oh, fine, fine!' She clapped her hands with delight at an idea that had just occurred to her.

"What's fine?" demanded Tessy.

"I'll have tableaux for the benefit of Dick's boys' club or your Settlement, or any old thing, and Dick shall be a shepherd playing me to him on a flute, and I'll be a nymph following, following because he's so beautiful and the music is so sweet I just can't help it! . . . Won't it be fine, Tessy? Can't you see it?"

Tessy nodded. She could fancy the scene and it had an idyllic beauty, with a shepherd whose fair, straight strength was worthy of the Golden Age, and a nymph as lightness and sparkle, a creature of woods and brooks among mossy slopes, in whose winsome face the lad's music should wake curiosity and eagerness and longing. But she seemed to see, too, a blackened sky that still had the likeness to Michael Thwaites's stormy, sorrowing face. Why should not Trix see it, too? Because she was Trix Tessy said to herself with a sigh and, after all, who would have her different? Her husband, came the answer — the man, who had loved her and to whom she was bound; man very human, faulty but loving; not an Ægean shepherd, not an Austrian count, not a playmate, but a partner in the serious business of life who, now that they had drifted apart, would forget the lover in the master, and then what of the pleasure-loving girl and the wood-nymph she was to personate?

"Tessy Thorley, you're thinking things!" Trixy interrupted impatiently. "It makes your face look — no look like me, dearie," she complained with pretty fondness

"I feel it, and I feel you sort of farther away than I like to have you."

"Trixy," Tessy's voice was shy; she felt like a spy upon sacred mysteries. "You — you are still very, very dear to each other, you and Michael?"

Beatrice shot a swift side glance at her. But she did not answer. She leaned forward and gave an order to the chauffeur, who turned the car, and they hurried down town.

"You — you still care for him, dear old Michael?" Tessy whispered.

Trix turned upon her. "You must n't bother about it, Tessy," she said decisively, and leaned forward looking eagerly out upon the brilliantly lighted street through which they were passing.

"But I do, Trix. I must. Forgive me, honey, but he's dear to me, he's part of me — of us. I can't bear that he should be hurt, Trixy!" she pleaded.

Beatrice faced her quickly, searching her troubled eyes. "It was a mistake, Tess," she said hesitatingly, but her voice grew firm as she continued. "He's not the kind of husband for me, he — he's not my husband any more. He never will be again."

"Oh, Trix!" It was a low cry that went to her sister's heart.

"Don't — don't, dearie," Trix whispered, nestling close to her and fondling the hand she held, "don't think of it. It — it's all right; it does n't make any difference. We'll just be like thousands of other people, and ——"

"No — no!" Tessy shook her head as though in pain.

"You little goose!" exclaimed Trix. "What right have you got to take it harder than either of us?"

"Harder — oh, Trixy, you don't know how you make him suffer."

"No?" asked Trixy lightly. "Who does? Has he told you?"

But Tessy was not yet prepared for that question; she dared not risk an affirmative. She feared to betray his confidence, and the effect of that confidence upon wilful Beatrix. "It's going to be all right again, Trix," she coaxed. "Oh, of course it will be. People who have loved each other don't fall out and never care again."

"People who have loved each other," repeated Trix slowly. "That's it, Tess. Doctor Thwaites loved a Mrs. Thwaites that was n't me. He's waiting, expecting me to be different and to get to be like her, and I never will if I live to be a thousand years old. And as for me —"

"As for you," Tessy spoke determinedly, "you're going to be good to him again; you're going to —"

"How can I when I don't like him?" asked Beatrix with childlike candour. "Honestly, Tetsy," she pronounced the composite little endearment with rare tenderness, "I don't honestly think I ever loved anybody or want to love anybody — but you, dearie!"

"Don't make us all unhappy," begged Tessy gently.

"Why — why, Tess! Of course, I'll do anything you ask me."

"Will you? Give up having anything to do with Count Thuri. You don't care for him, and —"

"Michael's been talking to you!" cried Beatrix, her eyes glowing with anger. "How dare he! How dare he tell tales about me to you! How dare he try to make you think me wicked and hate me! I'll never forgive him,

never! . . . You must always love me, Tessy," she urged tenderly, "you must, you must! No matter what he says, no matter what I do, you must always love me. . . . Oh, it's shameful of him! Would I tell things about him to anyone who loved him?"

"You have." Tessy's voice was low and trembling. "You have to me, and he's dear to me as though he were my very own brother. Don't take this brother from me, Trixy; I'd be lonely without him. Give him back to me; we were all so happy, we three."

"I'll be jealous if you care for him," said Trix with an uncertain voice.

"Will you?" Tessy looked up smiling. "Then you do love him, you do!"

Beatrice shook her head. "I'd be jealous of your love, not his. He mustn't take that away from me. I won't have it."

"Who could take it away from you, honey?"

"Tessy," Trix's response to the caressing cadence of that dear voice was immediate, "for you, not for him, I'm going to drop Count Max. Just to show you I'm not wicked enough to care for a nasty little foreigner like that. After this dinner to-night —"

"This dinner!"

"Yes." Beatrice's face was like a guilty child's, but she laughed away her embarrassment. The car had stopped where the lights blazed brightest and she was preparing to step out. "I'm to dine with him to-night. Good-night, wait for me, I'll be home early. And sure — sure, after to-night, I'll be good." There was no time for protestations; she sprang out, and with only a backward nod and another "Sure!" with a pat on the small

sniffing nose of the little animal under her arm, her train below the fur coat sweeping the carpeted steps, the aigrette nodding gaily above her eager little face, she hurried with

She was humming the waltz that came faintly in to her while the maid was taking her coat and while, standing before the glass, she set in order her hair which the driver had disarranged. It was an altogether happy face that looked back at her, a girl's face with parted lips and shining eyes, not a woman's, with never a hindering second thought behind it, and so exhilarated by the lights, the music, the well-dressed crowd, and the air of luxurious festivity that it seemed to have something vitally different in its speaking animation from all other faces there, however festive.

Maximilian, Count Thuri, was telling her this in his thick-tongued, clumsy way as he guided her toward the table. And she smiled as she listened; so strong a sense she had, so keen a delight in pleasuring, it did not seem strange to her that he should find it all in her face. For she loved pretty speeches, she glowed and flowered under them into new beauty; she was so in love with life and naively, with her own share in it and the body's self that gave it to her, that soft speeches and flattering eyes seemed but a proper accompaniment. Just as music swung her body into rhythm, so she caught the step of so gallantries and smiles and tender sighs, and danced to the tune of admiration with a joyousness as involuntary and reciprocal as that of a flower stalk swaying to the amorous wind. For a moment Mrs. Varney's absence dashed her satisfaction; her friend, the Count explained, had sent word at the last minute that a cold would not permit her to be with them this evening. But presently Beatrice was smiling again at his compliments.

"You will forgive me, Madame," he sighed sentimentally, eyeing her across the flowers, "if I express myself too ardently."

"Oh, you're forgiven — you're forgiven," she laughed back at him. "You know," she added confidentially, resting her delicate chin in the palms of her lifted hands while her elbows touched the table, "there's something so pleasing about pretty speeches that I never think of the one who gives me them, but only of the sweet, flowery things themselves."

His brows lifted. Was she laughing at him? Was there guile, after all, behind that lovely little face which took tribute from all eyes; even from those of the waiter who placed them, a fellow who had often served him, and whom he knew to be an automaton of routine and insensibility.

"So! Then a rose from any hand would smell as sweet?" Count Max questioned reproachfully. "Even from that of, say — Mr. Johns, who is coming this way?"

"This way! Where?" she demanded, and looked up to see Johns bowing toward them.

She smiled and nodded and said his name and was radiantly challenging at the disapproval she fancied she read in his manner. But when he said formally, "Good-evening, Mrs. Thwaites," and was about to pass on, a malicious inspiration came to her.

"Miss Thorley, of course, you mean," she said, with the air of graciously correcting a mistake.

Johns was taken aback, and Count Max looked up quickly, his light eyes a-glitter with curiosity. But she only smiled and with a nice imitation of Tessa's gentle humour, she said plaintively: "And a girl may sit beside a man

through a whole, long dinner, and he doesn't even know her when he meets her again! Good-evening, Mr. Johns," and she bowed his dismissal with an air of mock disappointment.

"I beg your pardon, I——" began the puzzled Johns. Then becoming convinced by the sincerity with which she played her rôle, he added quickly: "You know better than that; the note you were good enough to write in answer to mine, Miss Thorley——" He paused, as Trixy's eyes widened mischievously at this unexpected disclosure. "The voice is the voice of Esau," he said, "but ——" he stopped significantly.

"But the coat is that of — whom, Mr. Johns?" she demanded.

His eyes fell upon the pretty lace frock to which she called his attention. He had not consciously noted it when he dined at Doctor Thwaites's, but he knew now that it had its place in his memory, as had every detail connected with Tessy Thorley's appearance that night; even as he looked he could see her face alight with enthusiasm, as it was when its piquant young beauty taught him something new of himself. He must believe his eyes, he said to himself, but his heart was crying that it was not like Therese Thorley to dine alone with such a man as this Austrian. Though their actual acquaintance was slight, he knew her through his friend as the lovable sister Tessy, who uttered fiery radicalism and lived pure conservatism in the midst of unconventionality; who might be pagan by reason but was puritan by taste; whose clear little head was free-thinking, whose heart was sentiment-shackled; who declared stoutly that the great rebel Love could know no law and still be his glorious passionate self, yet passed

her days like a nun's; who approved with all her soul the theory of feminine emancipation, yet detested its most ardent devotees; who revered freedom, yet was separated even more completely from those who wantonly practiced it, than from those who denied and derided it. It was this Miss Thorley he thought he knew whose adorable inconsistency was between theory and practice, not a matter of times and places. And it was this Miss Thorley, he said to himself, who would have understood his bitter disappointment — if only she had existed anywhere but in Michael Thwaites's loyal breast and, for a few weeks, in his own imagination.

"I did not think I could mistake you," he said, slowly bowing again as he left her. "I beg your pardon — Good-evening." And including Count Max in his leave-taking, he crossed the room, hurrying away.

"Did you ever see such a goose?" chuckled Beatrix, turning to her companion. She threw out her hand in a gesture of amusement at such credulity. He caught it in his, and met her quickly lifted eyes with a smile of assurance. "What — what do you —" she stammered.

"Look, Madame." He still held her hand and traced the gold band that circled her third finger. "This little ring makes all the difference."

"Oh!" she laughed outright, "I never thought of that. Do you suppose he saw it?"

He shook his head. "If he had," he said significantly, "his swan song at the last would not have been so plaintive." He released her hand after lifting it to his lips. "What did you do it for, Madame?" he asked.

"What did you do that for?" she demanded hotly.

Her indignation did not seem to shake him. "Because

it is a beautiful little girl's hand, and because it is the custom in my country," he said nonchalantly, "and also for the same reason you chose to mystify the solemn gentleman, Johns."

"The same reason," she repeated frowning. "What reason?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Ah, my dear Madame, you know that better than I. I should be the last to find fault with it."

"I don't know what you are talking about," she returned impatiently.

A vague discontent with herself had come to trouble Beatrix's pleasure, and this dissatisfaction extended to her companion, in whose eager eyes there was a new and subtle expression, or perhaps only an unveiling of something that had hitherto dwelt discreetly behind them. But the dinner was too luxurious, the wines too many, and the man who drank so freely and whose guest she was, presuming in undefinable ways that she resented and could not explain.

It occurred to her that she need not wait for the elaborate meal to come to an end but, just as she thought of this and determined to escape, young Willaby, who had been dining with his friend Burke, came noisily up to greet her.

Their conversation was a vaudeville medley, a résumé of the latest gossip of those quick-living butterflies on the stage and in society, whose habitat is the rarified air of publicity, of whom they spoke by their first names and familiar diminutives, with a piquant muster of up-to-date phrases and an electric sprinkling of the latest and most picturesque slang. The whole was redeemed from vulgarity only by the perfect self-unconsciousness of the two,

and their boyish conviction that any other sort of life was not worth talking about, and any other method of speech must be undesirable and inadequate.

When they turned to leave her, Trix's beloved world was recreated, a world where people did as they pleased, and in which everything and everybody pleased; a world set at a high, joyous pitch where nonsense and gayety reigned, where young eyes laughed into young eyes, and hearts beat quick time to pleasure's rhythm, and the days became a succession of promising engagements and one recognized no fault, no folly, except the fault of being dull and the folly of being serious.

But this dear world of hers, like a rose-coloured bubble, fell to nothing in a moment, pricked by a word Willaby said as they took their leave. "We're going to meet Daisy and the Willises at nine to take 'em to the show. So we can't stick 'round, Count Max. Sorry you can't be among those present. Bye-bye, Lady Teazole."

She smiled faintly at the nickname they had agreed upon when her marriage, with one whom they recognized as a formal outsider, seemed to render necessary a substitute for the girlish appellation of their old intimacy.

Upon Count Thuri's ear, too, the title fell pleasingly. "It's a charming name for you," he said, and raised his glass. "Here's to you, adorable little Lady Teazole!"

She looked over into his smiling eyes as he drained the glass; her own were blazing with anger. "It was n't true then," she said, her tongue tripping over the words in her agitation. "Mrs. Varney had no intention of coming here to-night. You had not asked her, perhaps?"

He filled his glass again and hers and, still smiling, pledged her without words.

She writhed under those amused, cynical eyes that took no heed of what she said or how she said it, but only smiled at her indignation as at a childish display of anger which would pass if it were ignored.

"How — how dared you lie to me!" she demanded, leaning toward him.

In his turn he, too, bent forward. "How — how very beautiful you are when you think you are angry!" he said with a laughing imitation of her tone.

She sank back in her chair. Her hands were tightly clasped; she dared not look at him for the mounting wrath that shook and terrified her.

"It takes a little thing like you to be angry prettily, tiny Lady Teazle," he said, watching her with a sensuous pleasure in her throbbing beauty. "Big women become coarse-featured and repulsive when they rage. The colour in your cheek now," he added softly, "is rose — rose pink, soft, delicate, and satin like — like a rouge made of geranium petals." He put out his hands like one whom perfection has beggared in similes. "Shall we go?" he asked, rising as she did and, taking his coat and hat, he hurried after her. "I wanted to be alone with you," he murmured in her ear as they crossed the brilliantly lighted room. "You cannot blame me, you surely cannot."

"No? Why not?" she demanded, turning upon him at the entrance to the cloak-room.

"Did n't you lie, too, to Johns, for the same reason?"

"The same reason!" she repeated, gasping, "the same reason — to — to be ——" She turned her back upon him and entered the dressing-room. "You need not wait for me," she said, as she let the curtain drop behind her.

But he waited. She found him there when she came out in her wraps, the tiny dog peeping out of her big muff, and he walked beside her toward the door.

"Won't you be friends!" he pleaded. "What is it, after all, I have done? There's nothing wrong; it's quite proper for ——"

She gave an exclamation of disgust, and then quickly, as the doors swung behind them, a cry of delight. Up the stairs, coming toward them, was Dick Matthewson. His towering, well-proportioned height and his clear-cut upturned face seemed to her in this moment of revulsion the embodiment of masculine purity and chivalry.

"Oh, Dick!" she exclaimed, holding out both hands to him. "Oh, Dick!"

In her agitation and relief she accepted as quite natural his opportune appearance; it was not until they were seated in an electric cab and on their way to No. 17 Panhandle Place, that it occurred to her to wonder at his presence at this sumptuous café. For it was Dick's habit to say to his friends that he could not frequent fashionable places, as he spent all his money in pleasure; and sincerely, for it was his greatest pleasure to be at once big brother, playmate, and banker to the boys of his club.

"Johns told me that he had met you there — I ran across him," he said in answer to her question. "Or rather he said it was Tessy. But of course he had confused you two. I knew it was n't Tessy."

Trix's eyes were downcast. A lassitude had come over her now; she was emotionally exhausted. But the confident assertion of this last sentence stirred her.

"How could you be so sure?" she asked. "Mr. Johns thought it was Tessy when I let him believe so."

"You really pretended? Why? Why did you let Johns believe you were Tessy, Trix?"

She passed her hands slowly over the muff that lay in her lap; the small creature within it was asleep. "I wonder why I did," she said slowly. "I don't think — honestly, I don't think, and you must n't — you must n't think, Dick, that it was for any reason except to mystify that stiff old Mr. Johns." She put out her hand appealingly, and he took it in his.

He held and pressed it apologetically while he asked in the boyish voice that had still the catch in it, "Was it fair to Tess?"

The colour flushed in her face, and the agitation that had shaken her was throbbing behind her words when she spoke. "You're all so concerned about Tess, and yet you're so sure about her! You're not so sure about me, but you never —" The half utterance of such a sentiment shocked herself. "Don't listen to that, Dick," she begged. "I'm upset to-night. She's my Tessy, mine, and she'll lend me her name or herself or her whole life if I needed it. My own dear Tess! Just ask her!" she concluded.

"I don't need to," said Dick soberly.

Something tugged at Trix's wayward heart; in the emotional disturbance that surprised herself she could not define it, but she knew she longed that this big-hearted boy with the poise of a man and the face of a saint, should say to her something of the sort with that trusting note that thrilled her like music.

"It — it seems to hurt me, Dick," she said plaintively. "that you can be reconciled to my doing something that would n't be — that you're so sure Tessy would n't do not would n't care to do, but just would n't do."

He tried to speak but she would n't listen. "No, listen Dick, I want to tell you. I don't care what other men think; I'll get saucy and haughty if any one calls me to account, I suppose, but I did not intend to dine alone with that despicable Count Thuri." And in a torrent of hot words she poured out the story.

"Will you let me punch him, Trix, till he sort of understands what he's done?" he asked boyishly.

She shook her head. It was wine, though, to hear the warmth in his voice, and her eyes shone with pleasure as she looked up at him.

"No, I suppose not," he said slowly. "That would be Michael's business, and just now poor old Mike ——"

"You won't tell him?" she cried quickly.

"Not now." He sat a moment deliberating. "You'll tell him yourself later."

"I won't, and you must n't tell him," she repeated sharply. "I'm through with Count Thuri," she added, "I promised Tess."

"Oh, have you, Trix?" he asked warmly.

"Yes," she nodded saucily, conscious of a gay recovery of spirits. "That same Tessy who you're so sure would n't ever do Trixy things, will ——"

"Trix," he said gently, "do you know why I was sure that Tessy was n't at the café?"

"Oh, yes," she shrugged her pretty shoulders lightly. "Because she's the pure and holy and perfect 'good one'!"

"Possibly, but also because she was with Michael when I left to get you, Trix," he said slowly.

"To get me," she repeated, striving to comprehend the significant sympathy in his eyes. "Then — then ——"

"He's hurt, Trix, poor old Mike! Not seriously, he

thinks. An accident after the meeting — an attack. fellow, who escaped, probably thought he was Johns. I was brought to Number Seventeen. We'll be there moment."

"You — you are telling me the truth, Dick?" she a shuddering. "It — is n't — worse?"

"No, Michael says not, Trixy," he replied, lifting her as the cab stopped, and pressing reassuringly the tremt hand on his arm.

CHAPTER XI

MICHAEL THWAITES was not the ready-made reformer, born with that prepossessing temperamental oneness with the masses, which quickens communication between them and the man who steps out to them from the shadows of self. There is a something vocal in that gifted one, in his eye, in his gesture; in his whole body a calling out that is at once a sign of his vocation, his argument, and explanation. And when he does speak, he speaks the people's tongue and knows that he does, and so is confident of being understood, an assurance that begets confidence in him.

The first time Michael faced his audience in the Panhandle District, he experienced an overwhelming sense of intrusion that stood between him and his hearers, blocking communication between them, exasperating himself and chilling and disappointing them. But it was not in him to bear defeat. The desire to work, to benefit, to change, was stirring the depths of his nature, and his determination grew to find a medium of communication between himself and the composite brother he believed he could help. It was this, this personification of the crowd as one listening, weighing, judging individual, that cleared the way. He came to see himself and them as two vitally interested parties — he in expounding, they in hearing and deciding; and so the tyranny of numbers dropped from them. Experience brought not only the satisfactions of facility, but the delight of noting

effects, and Michael arrived at that stage when he could look forward with keen pleasure to presenting his thought in a new way to this composite listener of his, as to a clear-headed, critical friend who would test and perhaps applaud it.

He never attained to the vigour of Johns's address, the intense and passionate appeal of the proselyting spirit; but he became known as a shrewd and strong advocate with an unflinching sense of humour. He learned to speak good-naturedly and not to let good-nature detract from the earnestness that was in him. And that earnestness deepened and strengthened; it surprised him to find how much it had come to mean to him, this intercourse with the composite Big Brother who spoke rarely yet unmistakably, who subtly admitted the relationship he felt and demanded, who stood waiting with large, quiet patience for him to justify and prove himself.

It roused him, that attitude of trustful watchfulness. It spurred him, it fired his thoughts and filled full his intellectual life just when the tide of emotion, upon which passion had thrown itself, threatened to recede and leave him stranded. It did more; it gave him so strong a desire for success, with so purely altruistic a reason for his desire, as made his every effort in life hitherto seem pettily selfish.

As he left the platform the night he took Johns's place at an out-of-the-way meeting, his heart was full of thankfulness to the Big Brother who had given him his chance. He had spoken well that night, and knew it by the light in the faces nearest him and the intangibly sympathetic attitude of those further back in his audience; by his own excited under-currents of thought that ran on dumbly toward further exposition, and finally by the sudden memory of his mother's words crying back to him over the intervening years:

"And when it comes you 'll know there 's nothing in the world like it."

And now he knew; he repeated the phrase delighting in its significance and smiling with tender humility at the long-deferred realization of her prophecy, a realization that stamped him his mother's son, after all, and made him long for the sympathy she alone could have given him.

No, that was unfair, came his second thought, and he remembered Tessy Thorley's interest in his new work, her wistful envy of him, her praise and eager, girlish criticism. But remembrance of Tessy was too close to the image of Trix and, for the first time in his life, Michael Thwaites had reached a mental no-thoroughfare. He had come to a point where he dared not consider the relations between himself and his wife, where he strove not to think at all of her that he might not think harshly; he feared that ahead of him lay the time when he must choose between distasteful alternatives, and in his soul he did not yet know what his choice would be. Of only one thing he was sure: Trix would not help him and Tessy must help Trix; he should lose them both, the wife he had adored and the sister who had come to be so dear to him.

And yet it was this grouping of them in his thought which suddenly decided Michael to ask Tessy to save the happiness of all three. The letter he had written the day before had not been his first appeal to her, but with a delicacy that took account of his confidante's gentle and loving nature, he had refrained from revealing to her the extent of the disagreement that parted him and Trix. Since that very letter the breach had widened; with sorrow he realized that never again could he write even as forbearingly as he had so lately of his wife. Only this loved sister might bring the two together again, if even she could, and in despair Michael turned to her.

His purpose determined upon, even while he was bidding good-night to his fellows on the platform and some of the more demonstrative of his audience, he jumped into one of Johns's automobiles, in which he had driven to the meeting, and turned out toward the Settlement.

As the runabout sped on, his thoughts, too, hurried to the interview to come. He liked to be alone in a car, his hand on the throttle, and the dark night hurrying by; the sense of speed and of isolation seemed to assist his powers of concentration and clarify his mental vision. The town was very quiet out here—it was too early for the wild night life of Hell's Panhandle and too late for the peaceable, hard-working poor of the district. That feeling of large tenderness, that moves the thoughtful man who passes alone through a sleeping city and realizes the pathos of human helplessness, the childlike trust with which humanity lies down to rest, came to him, as he thought of its tears of the day and fears of the night hushed into deep-breathing unconsciousness, brushed quietly away by the great, black, velvety wing of Sleep.

But the pressing egotism of trouble centered his thoughts at last upon Tessy. If anyone could smooth the tangle in which suspicion on the husband's part and hot resentment on the wife's had taken the place of love and trust, it was this sister of both of them; a sister-in-love to Trix, in adoring forbearance, and to himself in justice and sympathy. Surely this one could adjudicate between them, could at least save the two whom she loved from passing from strangers to each other, as they were now, to the antagonists they threatened to become.

And yet the cruelty of it, the pity of making an umpire of one whose heart must be torn by mere knowledge of dissension! It came upon him anew as in fancy he put his case to

her, his and Trix's, and saw the tragedy of their strife blast the blameless one of the three. "Poor little girl! Poor little Tess!" he murmured to himself, and set his teeth and determined, as he had done so many times since he and Trix had grown apart, that he must bear his own misery, solve his own problems, and leave in peace a girl whose sensitive quickness to discord not even her wholesome and practical view of life could overcome.

He made the decision and impulsively acted upon it. With a quick turn of the wheel, he faced about to retrace his way, almost colliding, as he did so, with a large car that had stolen noiselessly up behind him. It was in that minute that he knew he had been followed. In a vague, sub-conscious way he had not been unaware of the presence of the automobile so persistently and silently keeping behind him, but he had been too deep in thought to take cognizance of the peculiar actions of the men in the car. There were four of them, he decided, though their lamps were not lighted and in the semi-darkness he could not trust his eyes. He recalled a recent conversation with Johns, in which the latter had shown him threatening anonymous letters he had received; but with the common sense of the matter-of-fact man, Michael had deprecated the possibility of violence, attributing his friend's acceptance of so melodramatic a contingency to an abnormal nervous condition brought about by long overstrain.

Quickly deciding that he himself was of too little importance in the civic warfare then waging to be singled out for punishment, he called out an apology to the occupants of the silent car and opened the throttle, meaning to send the runabout back toward town. It leapt forward and he had gained a block when, slowly, his power gave out and the

runabout stopped. He sprang out and began an investigation. Was it only one of the inevitable halts by the wayside that exasperate the motor lover, or had the machine actually been tampered with? Michael had not time to discover, for the big car, which had turned when he did, came swiftly upon him as he was rummaging in the repair box, and instinctively he jumped back into the runabout.

But even then, though he had done this with an idea of at least gaining a vantage point, it was because he thought the sinister occupants of the other car might be thieves, or be mistaken as to his identity. "I say," he called out, as the automobile shot up, "I wonder if you fellows could help me out. My engine's been disabled in some way."

The car stopped and the men jumped out. "Oh, yes, we'll help you, all right," laughed a loose-jointed big fellow, and started to get into the runabout.

"Not that way!" exclaimed Michael, quickly thrusting him back. He had caught up a heavy hammer and stood ready for the attack. His doubts were gone, for the man had thrown out his arms to seize him.

He never could tell definitely what followed. He had a memory of fierce joy in the blows he dealt without the slightest doubt of ultimate defeat; he knew of one antagonist who went crashing down before him and he had a queer, subconscious vision of just what surgical treatment that damaged skull would require. At the last it occurred to him that he must be able to identify his assailants, and he cried out tauntingly, hoping to make them betray themselves; but the three that were left only bent determinedly to their work. He strove to discover the number of their car, and when he was dragged from the runabout he fought desperately, battling for every inch that brought them nearer to his headlight; but

a blow that he dodged smashed his eye-glasses into fragments and he felt the warm blood on his cheek. After that he fought blindly, with the mere determination to strike and defend that his whole being seemed to have become merged in. But he knew enough, just before the blow came that left him senseless, to recognize the sound of an approaching cab; and though he could not see its lights, except as a ruddy haze, nor know when his assailants, picking up their disabled companion, fled, he was aware before consciousness left him that help was at hand.

The cabman, whose horse shied at the body lying in the road, was a horseman of the old school, with a profound knowledge of and respect for four-footed motors, and blackly ignorant and incurably hostile to their new-fangled successors. When he had picked Michael up and deposited him in the cab, smelling hospitably of the stable, he treated him medicinally in the one way with which he was familiar, forcing the neck of his whiskey flask between his patient's teeth and pouring as much of the strong spirits into his mouth as he could. Much of it ran away, but soon Michael drew a shuddering breath and then choked violently. The result was thoroughly satisfactory to the cabby, for the bruised and battered man, as soon as he was able to speak, said distinctly, "Number 17 Panhandle Place."

"Number Siventeen, 't is," said the cabman, "or 't will be. Why in the name of all the saints did n't ye say that in the beginning to an honest cab, stid of a divvle-machine like yonder? Sure no fower-legged beast could smash a man as that thing yonder 's smashed ye. Will ye deny that?"

The man in his arms opened one eye; the other was evidently injured. "Seventeen Panhandle Place," he said with painful deliberation.

"Oh, all right, all right!" exclaimed the driver, nettled. "Ye 're ividently one of thim that can't be cured by one b'ating. Well, ye 'll have your fill, I bet ye, from yon divvle."

But his fare did not answer. He slipped from the cabman's arms to the floor and there, after another attempt at treatment and closing the door upon him, the driver left him, addressing an insulting remark to the stalled runabout as he mounted to his seat and drove off.

Later, Michael decided that it must have been a recurrent impression of what had been his destination before he turned back, that impelled him to give the number of the Settlement house to the rescuing cabman. Once there, though, he yielded to the exquisite feeling of being cared for. He lost and regained consciousness with alarming suddenness and frequency, but it seemed to him that Tessy's tense, quiet voice bridged all the swooning chasms. He held with tenacity to her hands. Each time he fainted and lost them, his body too fell from him, and consciousness struggled among amorphous, disconnected members, which had nothing to distinguish them from the horrors of the dissecting room, except that they could writhe with pain and gather themselves together again. Each time that something required him to reassume his identity, he felt himself with nausea piecing together these bloody, writhing fragments, and making up a body for his soul to come back to. But when he got back, there was Tessy's white bed upon which they had laid him, her firm cool hands to cling to, her voice that each time grew stronger and clearer and asked questions, quick and short, and supplied the answers, and a something that was all of her and was incredibly buoyant, breathing courage and understanding everything he was struggling to say; something that, he could feel, was seconding the physicians

bending over him, whose very names were gone though he had known and worked with them for years.

It was midnight when he waked to consecutive clearheadedness; he heard the clock strike and counted the strokes as a test. By the bandages that held him he knew the surgeons' work was done. He felt an utter disinclination to move a muscle, and a quick summary of pains sufficed to locate his injuries. But after all, he thought grimly, as he strove to diagnose his case, the material must have been tough and stout that showed so little effect from such a beating.

"A — a lot of bruises, a broken bone or two," he said, forming the words slowly, but speaking to Tessy as though they two had but just this moment been discussing his case, "a pretty badly wrenched shoulder and — and a skull that has just escaped fracture. Considerable shock. I — get off pretty well, don't I, Tess?"

She was by his side in an instant, and laid her hand on his. "We nurses have orders, sir," she said, trying to speak lightly, "not to permit patients to talk after an accident. Doctor Middleton never permits it. His own nurse is in the next room waiting to take charge," she added warningly.

"Oh, indeed!" Michael smiled grimly; it was a tonic, the hint of gayety in her voice. "Well, Middleton is going to have a new sort of patient this time. Have you ever thought what refinement of cruelty we modern doctors and trained nurses can be capable of, Tess? Just when a man's brain is whirring, like a mad clock with the spring jarred loose, we calmly bid him lie quiet, forbid him to talk, or to think. Bah, what a mechanical, soulless trade it is!"

"Oh, hush, Michael, you must n't talk!" cried his nurse, and yet she longed for a question from him that should have been asked an hour and more ago.

"I don't know about that," he retorted. "Thwaite who's pretty much of an authority himself, has a new method that works well with some patients and certain nurse. Come, sit down, Tess, and be human." He drew her gently to the chair beside him and turned with a half-stifled groan. She uttered an exclamation of caution and reproof, and he smiled sardonically. "You're only officially disapproving you know you are, Tess. Don't try any humbug on me. We're two augurs, my dear little nurse, you and I, but we have a saving sense of humour that permits us to laugh, in private at least, in each other's faces."

She bent a dissenting little face to him. "Just the same Doctor Thwaites, if you don't keep that poor head quiet I'll throw up the case," she declared.

He chuckled despite his discomfort. "And send me a life-sized nurse, instead of a midget, who'll gossip with me to her heart's content when we're alone, and affect an insurmountable reserve when anybody else appears. Oh I know you and your sisters!"

The word in the plural fell lightly from his tongue, but it set Tessy's heart beating. Why did he not ask for Trix? Were these two really hopelessly estranged? she cried to herself. Aloud she said literally: "Doctor Middleton's nurse is a man," and fell silent; she could not continue the facetious conversational pace she herself had set.

Her silence changed the trend of his thought. "What does Johns say?" he asked. "Does he know?"

"We telephoned him," she said. "He is sure that it was a plot of the Boss against himself; it had been widely advertised that he was to speak to-night, and ——"

"And the blundering beast he hired, not knowing of the change in programme, got me instead. Well . . ."

The pause was long. Tessy turned sharply, but he finished his sentence slowly, "the only effect of such villainy on me, after I'm patched up, is, of course, to set me at the business stronger than ever. I'm in it heart and soul now."

She bent and touched his damp forehead anxiously. "I'm glad, glad of it," she murmured. "We'll talk it all over when Mr. Johns comes," she added, moving away with a gentle air of conclusion.

He looked after her a moment. But floating spots danced before him and he closed his eyes, and soon the after-weakness of the bone-setting came upon him and he dozed. When he waked it was to put up his hand to the face bending over. "Trixy!" he breathed.

"Not Trix — Tessy," she corrected quickly, looking with alarm into the dark eye with its dilated pupil searching her face; its mate was hidden by bandages. "She's here, Michael. Wait, I'll get her."

But he held her a moment. "Sure?" he asked doubtfully. "You two must play no tricks with me," he added slowly, "for I'm helpless. Something's gone out of the world, my world — of sight; it's colour, I think, and there's a cloud, black — I — I can't be sure —"

"Hush," she said, under her breath. "Here she is. Here's Trix."

It was a shaken, trembling Trix, her little face pale and frightened, the hands with which she took his fluttering with nervous dread. "You poor old Mike!" she stammered, and Tessy slipped away.

He drew her down and kissed her and held her cold little hands, looking into her face with a straining sight that added strangely to her trouble. "Have I been unkind to you, Trixy?" he murmured. "Have I been lacking in many

things, in patience and kindness? Have I, golden humming-bird?"

He drew her to him and she let her head sink beside his. But his tenderness, after weeks of estrangement, fell strangely upon her ears. "You — you 're not going to die, Michael?" she gasped, shivering.

He shook his head with a grim smile that quieted her alarms, but still she was ill at ease. It was her nature to find those with whom she differed, and who sought to make her suffer for those differences, terribly changed; so almost impossible was it for her to recognize the one who loved her in the one who thwarted her. Then, too, sick people seemed other people to her. She was like a child in her susceptibility to differences between physical normality and the stricken. There was a something uncanny to her in illness, as though the being she had known in health were bewitched now, and so transformed into some ailing stranger. Long ago old Peter Thorley had been made aware of this by the shrinking reluctance with which she entered his room when he was suffering; as though, he had said, she suffered in the sight and held her breath till she might be gone. And Michael, too, felt something of this; the ardour was gone from his voice when he spoke again.

"I'm likely to live long to vex and tyrannize over you," he said.

"I'm so glad it is n't serious," she exclaimed, with a sigh of relief.

"Serious!" he repeated, looking thoughtfully into her face. "There are serious things in life, too, Trix, more serious than death itself." He put his hand to his bandaged head.

She writhed uncomfortably in his arms and he let her go. "Oh, don't talk like that! Get well quick," she cried.

He looked up at her, holding her eyes for a long moment. "Yes," he nodded, but it was in answer to his own thought. "Tell Tessy to come, will you?" he added.

She went to the door and beckoned to Tess, and they came and stood beside him; it was then he noted the contrast between the nurse's uniform and the lace gown Trix wore.

"You've been out, Trix — where?" he asked, his voice crisp and cold.

"Oh ——" she shrugged, lightly evasive. "Just a little affair."

A silence fell upon all three. There was a singing in Tessy's ears. Something she herself must say, could say, did not know how to say, worded itself confusedly. Then the second passed, and Michael's voice questioned her as calmly as though the other question had not been uttered.

"This bandage, Tess," he touched it, "is not for the head but ——" The hesitation was brief. "— but the eye. Tell me."

"Yes," she answered slowly, "for the eye, Michael."

"Winslow's been here?" he asked.

"Yes. He said . . ." She paused.

"Come, come! No professional lies," he commanded.

She nodded and, putting an arm about Trix as though to shield her, she touched the bandage that covered the injured eye caressingly. "He said he was sure no glass had entered the eye, dear. He has hopes of saving it."

"Saving it!" cried Trix.

"Hush, Trixy," soothed Tess, and her voice (Michael noted it again, as he had often done) had a quality when speaking to this beloved sister that it had not for anyone else. "We're sure it'll be all right. Don't you — don't you think so yourself, Michael?" she implored.

It was familiar ground she was inviting him to take with her. Michael recognized it. Trix must be spared, because she was not used to bear burdens; because her world had always known her to be light-hearted; because she was so dear to it in this childlike guise; because, in short, she was Trix. He looked at the two a moment, so like now, to his darkened vision, they seemed to merge in one, and that one embodying a demand that typified their whole and sole relationship to him — he must not hurt Trix.

“Yes — yes,” he answered, and soon he sent them both to bed, saying he should sleep, and Doctor Middleton’s man might watch with him.

The nurse, Brett, was considerably in awe of his patient. Still he sought, with a deprecating air, to fulfil in this case the various formulæ which is the profession’s sacred ritual. But when time came for him to report to Doctor Middleton, Brett was able only to tell his chief that the patient had not seemed to sleep at all; that on patient’s own assurance (which was all that was available) his pulse and temperature were approximately what they might be expected to be after such a shock, and that the services which Brett had been permitted to render to the distinguished invalid might quite as well be performed by the veriest apprentice, for which reason Brett respectfully asked his discharge.

Doctor Middleton laughed, and spent half the time of his call upon Michael merrily unfolding, in Brett’s painfully protesting presence, the tale of the nurse’s discontent. The rest of the visit, Brett noted, consisted of surgical gossip concerning certain peculiar cases; the sole medical attention which he observed was a cigarette which the visiting surgeon proffered and the disabled one smoked. From this atrocity, however, the punctilious Brett at first derived some atoning

satisfaction for, the oculist arriving presently, he soundly rated the surgeon for an indulgence which might injure the eye he was treating; but it appeared that this, too, was only part of the unaccountable management of a unique case in surgical annals for, after declaring the afflicted eye in "bully shape," the offended oculist carried the insulted surgeon off to lunch, and Brett, helpless and bewildered, was laughingly left in his patient's charge with minute instructions as to his personal diet, and ridiculous and utterly incomprehensible orders for his own treatment.

Yet that day and for many days Doctor Middleton's nurse justified his chief's rating of him, for he adapted himself even to this topsy-turvy case. Something that no physician, however wise, could have taught him, restrained him from speech when, after the boisterous leave-taking of the doctors, his patient sank into long reverie. No orders for day or night had prescribed discretion or tact like Brett's. And yet, despite his literal-mindedness, he turned to these for guidance when the sacred red-taped symbols of his order were taken from him and he was left in charge of a case that had no precedent.

He came to understand, without being told and without betraying his discovery, that his first duty consisted in standing between his patient and the few who were nearest to him; to give cheering reports to the beautiful little wife whose delight in good news was so prettily apparent and easy to satisfy; to baffle and perplex and defeat the purpose that shone in the sister-in-law's eye to probe through his phrases and detect the truth; to keep these two from the sick chamber with all the subtle, unapparent arts he possessed — but this became easier when his patient was moved to his own home — and to admit there a middle-aged gentleman who

spoke in orations, despite his promises and apologies, and an athletic, blonde young man whose speech was unimportant, but whose handsome presence seemed to fill the sick-room with cheer and to be as welcome to the gay little wife as to her husband.

And still Brett nursed, nursed triumphantly, yet unobtrusively, as though to prove his election to the holy office despite the absence of sanctioning symbols. In the emotional estrangement Michael felt from those who had been dearest to him, this discreet and silent stranger came to be very welcome. There were long, silent hours of depression when the future looked Michael Thwaites in the face, but for the present Brett was there to keep action at bay and life on a superficial basis; to tide over the achingly helpless days with a busy pretense of occupation, and to postpone, even to Michael himself, recognition of his new dependence.

CHAPTER XII

IT WAS upon Michael's first visit to his office, tentatively to pick up the strands he had been weaving when Fate suddenly snatched them from his busy hands, that two men were ushered into his consulting-room.

"They've been coming every day now for a fortnight; at least one of them has," his office nurse explained. "I told them that Doctor Middleton was attending to your practice, but they won't listen to that, and one of them — a foreigner, I think, that looks wretched — keeps coming and waits patiently every day till I close the office; then he goes miserably away and we lock up. To-day they're both inside, but I haven't told them you're here. Shall I?"

Michael looked scrutinizingly at the two as they took the chairs he indicated. He could not refrain from testing his sight, to discover if his eyes could still closely anticipate his patient's pathological history.

"My name's Tracy, sir," said the older of the two, dismissing his dapper person comfortably, while he turned a sallow, high-coloured visage toward Michael. "And this is Mr. Brocato — Joe Brocato."

"Which of you ——" began Michael. But he did not finish the question for, upon turning to the loose-jointed big fellow seated in dejected embarrassment before him, he met the man's eyes. They were light, clear, watchful; he was sure he had met them before, but not with such a prayer in them, such an animal-like beseeching as they now expressed.

"We ain't either of us sick, Doctor," said Tracy easily. "Leastwise, not bodily. Wavy there — Brocato is sick in his mind — wheels, I guess it is he's got all right." He concluded the sentence contemptuously, tapping his own hard little head significantly.

"You've come to the wrong place," said Michael quickly, turning to his desk. "I'm not —"

"No, we have n't. We've come to the right man, all right," insisted Tracy. "Just give me a minute and I'll prove it to you. The trouble with Wavy is that he an' his gang beat up a man some weeks ago, an' Wavy's discovered it was n't —"

Michael sprang from his chair; he knew now where and when those watchful eyes had met his. "So it was you!" he cried, starting forward.

"Yes — it was me." The man kept his seat and the eyes upturned to Michael never wavered.

Michael's uplifted hand fell. "What do you want?" he demanded roughly. "What have you come here for?"

Brocato's eyes shifted a moment to his companion and then came back to rest with their insistent mute appeal upon Michael's face.

"It's this way, Doctor T'waites," explained Tracy. "The Wavy-eared ain't no squealer, but this time he got the wrong man. That would n't feaze him, but you see the folks out at Panhandle Place have been mighty white to Wavy's wife that was."

"Oh!" Michael nodded, as he sat back again in his chair regarding them. "I've heard of you."

"Thank ye, sir. Shorty Tracy, at your service. I'm friends with Miss T'orley."

Michael's smile was grim. "It is n't only from the

Settlement that one hears of you — the Boss's dirty man who hires dirtier ones to do his dirty work."

Tracy shrugged his heavy, compact little shoulders with an air of large tolerance. "It takes a heap of sorts to make a world," he remarked sagely. "But as to me, I got my wits yet. This — this Brocato *used* to be a fellow I'd some respect for," he went on with a severely disapprobative glance at his companion, "an' it 's because of what 's been between us that I 'm here to help him this last time. He 's been a good man in his day, but now he 's lost his grit. It 's the yellow-streaked furriner in him, I suppose," he added, with a sneer. "When he hears his gang has done *you* up, 'stead of — of someone else, an' that you 're Miss T'orley's brother-in-law (an' when Jennie Brocato was dying in the street, where he 'd turned her for cause, Miss T'orley took her in an' did for her to the last) then he falls to pieces, goes to a priest, a dago priest, not an Irish one, an' confesses. An' the Eyetalian tells him there 's to be no peace an' no comfort for him till he comes an' tells you about it. So here he is."

As Tracy finished his speech with an accent of scorn that declared himself quit of responsibility in the matter, Brocato nodded; evidently the explanation, uncomplimentary as it was, satisfied him. Michael looked at him, in bewilderment as well as wrath; and the watchful man who sat opposite looked back, with unchanging dumb appeal that could not pierce the inscrutable dark glasses his victim wore.

"What — what do you expect?" demanded Michael furiously. "What do you — what would you give to a man who had done to you what you did to me!"

Brocato put out his hands — a helpless gesture; he had no suggestions to make, he could only look beseechingly out of his steady light eyes that were so repugnantly animal-like

to Michael. But that dumb lack of defense, that utter surrender, was disarming; it was the primitive self-abandonment of the brute to the brute, with a hideous acceptance beforehand of all conditions. It was revolting. How could magnanimity touch such revenge and not be defiled!

"You — you 'd ought to know a little something about Wavy," put in Tracy with an acute reading of the situation. "He 's ready to take his medicine. He 'll go now, if you say the word, to the nearest station and give himself up."

"Telling that —"

"Tellin' 'em that he had a grudge against another fellow an' thought you was the other fellow."

"Ah!" Michael's black-bearded chin went up. "So it is n't unconditional surrender after all." Tracy hitched up his chair combatively and tried to speak, but Michael's contemptuous words cut him short. "He knows and you know and I know that he had no personal grudge; that it was for no personal enemy he took me," he growled. "If there 's any reality to this queer pretense of his that something from me can put him right with his priest, tell him yes — yes, he can say I forgive him fully."

"Oh!" the Sicilian fell on his knees and sought Michael's hand, but it was snatched from him as though his touch had been flame.

"Fully, I say," Michael's voice rose in his wrath, "but my forgiveness depends on his exposing the scoundrels who hired him. A full confession — will he make that?"

Brocato had sunk back overwhelmed. In his curious light eyes fixed upon Michael's face there was the dumb, moist self-pity of a dog that has been beaten.

"You — you 're a hard man," snarled Tracy. "A fellow comes to you that need n't, that 's got his alibi all right,

and mighty small chance of *your* attacking it when you know what it is — he comes to you, hands up, an' wants to take the worst you 'll give him. But the worst ain't enough for you saintly folks; you want him to make a liar an' informer of himself, to t'row down the men that trusted him an' stood by him an' are ready to go on standin' by him. You only want him to damn his soul for a cheat an' a crook, that 's all you want!"

"You 're mistaken," Michael cut in coldly. "I don't want anything from him — or you — but to get out of here. Get!"

"You 're a great politician," said Tracy sardonically as he rose. But an imploring look from the Sicilian held him. "He can go an' give himself up, that 's what he can do," he added angrily.

"Of course he can," sneered Michael. "Why did n't he, without coming here?"

"Because," cried Brocato, and his utterance was choked and gasping, "because ——"

"Oh, because of what the priest said," growled Tracy helplessly. "What sort of priest is it that won't let serving his time be enough punishment for a man! . . . Buck up, Wavy!" he added, "the law says that 's enough for any man."

"But not the Father," moaned Brocato.

Desperately Tracy, a man of resource, sought for a way out of the difficulty. "I say, Doctor, Wavy ain't all t'ug," he expostulated. "He comes from a country where men t'ink with knives in their fists; but he 's got some honour, he has. Why, the swells up at the restaurant where he waits would trust him with anything they 've got, they would!"

In spite of his exasperation Michael laughed. "It must be a swell restaurant that hires your protégé for waiter," he said sardonically.

"It is, all right," responded Tracy naïvely. "If it's good enough for Count Thuri an' Miss Therese T'orley, it's swell enough for annybody in town, I guess."

It was clumsily done, but he had made his point. Involuntarily, Michael turned toward him, and the silent significance of the quick movement was strong as a question.

"Sure," said Tracy in answer. "That very night you jumped into a trap set for somebody else, Wavy here, stiff an' fine in the Eytalian Café's livery, was waitin' at table of Count Max (who's a spender all right) an' Miss T'orley, an' in her glad rags. Show me a finer alibi than that! Perhaps the lady did n't recognize Joe, but the Count knows him a right, an' called him by name. If Wavy did n't wait t'roug the whole supper, d'ye suppose Count Max remembers the part of it when he's busy courtin' a lady? . . . He waited a moment. "They could both be subpœnaed, you know." He paused again. "But Joe's ready to give all up and serve his time, too, if you'll only make it right wit the priest, an' —"

Tracy broke off amazed. Doctor Thwaites was facing his desk and writing with an air of complete preoccupation. Then Tracy wheeled sharply. The office nurse stood beside him, her expressionless, placid face turned suggestively toward the door which she held open. "This way out if you please," she said formally. And Tracy, with a hand on Brocato's shoulder, whom he had almost to drag after him, went out. In the hall he stopped a moment. "Buck up!" he whispered hoarsely, "Buck up, Wavy. If ye'd g back an' stick a knife in him I'd have some respect for ye! But Brocato's spirit was broken; he shook his head, followin Tracy out of the hall and down the steps like one from whom all hope is gone.

Still, if Tracy could have seen behind the door that closed on them, he might have been satisfied. For Michael Thwaites was facing life with a despairing consciousness that at last definite knowledge had put an end to tormenting suspicion. There was no doubt in his mind of the identity of Count Thuri's companion at the Italian Café; there could be no doubt; he knew.

To men like Thwaites, of fastidious masterfulness, with a feeling for domination over those who engage their affections, all the stronger for being unreasoned, and an unwillingness to admit the possibility of that right's even being questioned, the evasions of disingenuousness have a treasonable quality which they instinctively punish by outlawry. Among the ancestors who made Michael Thwaites's body and mind a battle-ground for the struggle of existence of temperaments and traits, was an Indian woman whose father had never forgiven her nor the white man who had carried her off a century and a half ago and married her. In the smoky black of this far-off descendant's straight, stubby mustache and short, pugnacious imperial, in a certain forbidding expression when his face hardened (as it had now at thought of his wife's complete indifference to his wishes), above all, in his incapacity to pardon deception in those he loved, that old progenitor's blood triumphed. And with the far-off father who never forgave, as well as this child of his and another race, it was not arrogance that cut off instantly from the offender; it was that a curtain seemed to fall between them and him, he became subtly changed to them, not of their own volition, but by some magic in disillusion which rendered him other than he had been before.

The force of this separation Michael felt now with a finality that was crushing. Strong and sure of himself, he was

incapable of meanness, but not of injustice. By grace of passion he had hitherto seen his wife as a bewitching girl whose unlikeness in temperament to his own exquisitely emphasized sex and painted the world with novelty and richness. But that glamour gone, there still remained differences, but differences irreconcilable and tragic.

A serious-minded man, but with the resenting weakness of the pessimist (due partly perhaps to the defect in his sight, which had augmented instead of being overcome by the years) he knew only friends or enemies; those to whom he was indifferent did not exist for him; while Beatrix had scores of intimates of whom every man she knew was an adorer, real or gallantly simulated, and every woman a gay confidante.

Thwaites had reached intellectual maturity early, but that singleness of purpose which comes when the man and his vocation are perfectly mated he had missed. Yet he had found himself, and knew what life had to offer that was worth to him the struggle to get it. At twenty-two Beatrix Thwaites was as eager a child as she had been at two, at twelve, at eighteen. That exquisite sense of success and fitness, that absorption which Michael found in his new work, she experienced in what was not a pursuit of gayety, but rather an accompanying of it, for she and lightheartedness were one, and all she asked was that, like the poppy of pleasure she was, she be set in the soil in which she should flower most brilliantly; and her movement toward what gratified this instinct was as involuntary as the plant's in search of food and light. Had she married an older or a younger man (one who might have warmed himself at the glow of her joyous vitality, or the mate in years and temperament who would have drunk with her open-throated from pleasure's chalice) the end of

their days might have found them happy and together, with the tenacious memories of comradeship, though in the lighter ways of living, in place of the deeper emotional ties that interlace and grow stronger till they become more vital, perhaps, than the beings they bind so closely.

"You married me because I was me!" she cried once to him. "And now you'd have me be somebody else. I won't! I'll be myself as long as I live. When I'm not me, the me I've always been, I won't be at all. Be sure of that!"

Her sense of the inapplicability to her of his standard, her determination not to permit criticism of her own — for reason and argument from him, who could no longer be her lover since he had become her critic, were indistinguishable to her from faultfinding — all this was as real and strong to Trix as Michael's growing impatience of her frivolity, his consciousness of furious impotence to change or control her, or to adapt himself, even if he would, to her ways.

In the larger vision that comes with facing death, or rather the consequent belittling of human passions, Michael had turned to his wife the night of the accident with regret and an unspoken promise. A sense of the briefness, the pitiful, puny span of man's life, had come upon him, and he blushed at his own lack of philosophy, at the petty, squalid thing he and she were making of the marriage that had once seemed to him a miraculous enlarging of individuality; as though one should be endowed with two identities, and two should live but as a greater one. As the older and more experienced, he assumed, in that generous moment, the blame for their common failure. And though, even then, he had smiled to note her ready acceptance of him in this rôle, he thought he had drawn sufficient patience and philosophy from his

quick glimpse into eternity to class this, too, as one of the trivialities which it belittles one unduly to dwell upon.

But Michael was not the first philosopher to discover that living life is more trying than contemplating death. His very overture of peace Beatrix construed, in accordance with the light laws of her nature, merely as self-vindication, unnecessary in her own eyes, but perhaps useful in his. She was too resilient a creature to attach much significance to it; yet it pleased her to interpret her husband's words as the relinquishment of a right to restrict, which he had asserted but which she had never acknowledged.

A creature herself of frothy volubility, it never occurred to her to measure the cost to reserve and a deeper nature, of that outstretched hand which she took so amiably and dropped so heedlessly. It meant nothing more to her than a desire for peace, which she shared with him; but it was all that she did share, all that they two now had in common. Thought deep enough to stir emotion was unpleasant to Beatrix; she resented and avoided it as a schoolgirl would a task. Feeling was a fragile flower that fell full-blown into her hands, into her heart; it had no season of growth, and its decay was so swift as to leave behind not even the perfume of what had been. Certainly no troublesome brooding upon past or present marred the light-heartedness with which she went about the business of pleasure in those days. She made little visits to his sick-room and chattered there of her plans, ignoring his former expression of distaste for certain of her companions and some of her delights, as something tactfully to be forgotten. She was so obviously preoccupied by her share and Dick Matthewson's in the tableaux which she was arranging for a coming festivity, that he listened in what she interpreted as acquiescing silence till she left him, carrying

h her that sense of light complacency with which the witable so often quit the invalid, fancying they have guiled his weary hours.

Often, as he lay looking after her with the bitter smile of the illusioned, Michael had said to himself that they could not further apart; but this was before knowledge had come him that she would deliberately disobey his expressed command for an evening alone with this young Austrian, es of whose exploits were to be found almost daily now the newspapers — the tawdry, reckless exploits of a youth-vulgarian unbridling his appetites in what distance and velty and his own disdainful aristocracy made appear to him frontier land. The incident at the Italian Café seemed so to stallize Michael's feeling that he realized how impossible it s, in his present frame of mind, at least, to preserve the previous pretense of peace upon which Beatrix went on building flimsily pretty card-houses; in which there might come be no room, he feared, for a man to retain self-respect. But he was not ready for a crisis; he was still not strong, l he shrank from decision, and the effect of his first thorough test of his eyes had depressed him. So he suddenly sided to acquiesce in his brother physician's suggestion of change of scene and, after telephoning his decision to the aid (Beatrix was at a rehearsal) he started hastily with ett for a little place on the island, left him by his father, ich he had not visited since he was a boy.

From here, on the plea that it was best not to use his eyes, sent explanatory messages but, with the exception of a g, dictated letter to Archibald Johns concerning the visit his office of his penitent assailant, he held no communication with those he had left. He had a difficult situation to æ, and he needed the help of solitude and stillness.

As a rule it is a bloodless, bitter battle, the civic warfare of to-day, in which the subtle weapons of slander, of intimidation, of purchased disaffection, and corrupted courts replace the more material modes of bodily destruction. But in this instance all these had been employed only to be superseded at last by the primitive method.

The situation, as Archibald Johns outlined it, was this: Behind a menaced political Boss the lines were drawn up. Here was the plutocracy caught between the hammer of swollen desire and the anvil of the unprincipled middleman whose trade is corruption, and an administration whose successful installation was in itself testimony of the Boss's power; power increased and increasing, as a dishonouring political consequence, because of his lucrative letters of marque, which legitimized municipal piracy and bestowed upon him a monopoly of it.

The captains of finance had recognized the situation and, being thrifty business men, promptly profited by it; and the system worked smoothly, as skilfully devised systems will, till a challenging voice from an impertinent outsider (who had not been despoiled, save in his civic capacity) demanded an accounting, which must reveal a source as well as an outlet for bribe money, and hold finance jointly responsible for conditions of which it had taken advantage.

They ignored that voice. They recognized it only to heap upon it ridicule and contempt. They strove to silence it in a confusing turmoil of personalities. Indirectly they warned it of the fate of the meddler. They accused it of vagaries. They demanded its credentials. They tried to smother it in technicalities. All this they did in turn and then, as events progressed and pursuit quickened, ostensibly they abandoned the guilty middleman, in whose turpitude

their own dishonour was rooted. Secretly, however, they hurried to his aid all their wealth and wit and power, that terror might not seize him, that craft might not dispose him to traitorous acknowledgment, and the insistent voice finally get its answer.

But its untiring persistence convinced them at last of a determination as strong as their own to uncover what they meant to keep hidden. So they turned their respectable backs upon recognized methods, closed eyes and ears, and handed the outlaw over to one who had had experience in silencing troublesome voices.

The Boss tried his practised hand then; but he knew only three kinds of agitators — those who could be bought, those who could be frightened, and those who could be tired out. Discovery of a fourth and hitherto unknown variety brought him a swift vision of the end, for the Boss, unlike his customers, was not given to self-deception, and he had known all along the specifying name which the world has for systems such as his when they are once uncovered. He knew, too, not imaginatively, but from realistic experiences of some of his co-workers, that to have one's doings labeled is only the preliminary to being labeled oneself. The civic pirate, who had succeeded so ingeniously and for so long a period, saw himself in stripes, and in his panic he had recourse to methods of warfare in vogue in cruder times and ruder places; weapons primitive and dangerous, in short, as the boomerang whose action, as it were in sardonic mimicry, they sometimes copy.

In the attack upon Michael, Archibald Johns had a new and difficult phase of his problem to solve. But he welcomed it as distraction, for it came at a time when his heart was sore, when he had become convinced that an ideal flowering in his fancy had, after all, never been embodied; never

had had its home in the girl whose piquant person suggested to him the possibilities of companionship of youth dreams and maturity despairs, but which age some realizes. Each time he met Therese Thorley (and Michael illness had brought them together often) the dream was again within him. And every time he left her he carried not the memory of her face, but that other opposite to he believed she had smilingly sat that night at the Café, the heavy, brutal young face of Count Maximilian eyes fixed upon her with an odious, enraging intelligence.

To renounce faith in her fineness, to acknowledge her lesser than his ideal, was bitter to Johns, a man whose temperament and circumstances combined to render so who found himself, owing to the uncompromising stand he had taken against civic corruption, abandoned by the liberal, the base, the conservative, and the indifferent, till his friends were few and his enemies many. He was a man whose purpose as stern and single as his own. With the monomaniacal instinct of the proselytist, he had sought to cement friendship with Michael Thwaites. At a time when the need of strengthening adherents was vital, it meant much to him, the accession of this young man of fortune, of international reputation and, happily, of disassociation from political parties and ambitions, who had nevertheless for statecraft and a rare altruistic interest in municipal

It was with that quick insight into future possibilities that made him so redoubtable an opponent politically, that he resolved to profit by the Boss's mistake, and the double take in carrying out his orders. Brocato's curious confession he decided, must remain for the present a secret source of possibilities, not to be divulged until its extent had

measured. Johns had an audacious sense of situation, as well as an understanding of the rôle emotion plays in politics. He could not show his Cæsar's body marred by traitors, but he could appeal to that chivalric sense of dramatic proportion, which is the morality of mobs, for the only reparation that could be made to an innocent man struck down for a party's principles; and demand the assumption of his indignities as a common cross, and the elevation of the vicarious sufferer to be standard bearer, to enjoy the honours, as he had been made to bear the pains, of prominence.

Upon the work of preparing the way to this end, Johns concentrated himself. It was not easy to bring about, but this forthright and forcible persuader of men played upon his theme skilfully, his very magnanimity in putting another upon the pinnacle his own effort had shaped subtly purifying and broadening its scope, till men accustomed to the pretentious political mask behind which pettiness and insincerity hide, recognized truth and honest conviction, and gave up their minds and hearts to him.

CHAPTER XIII

A GLOWING little nymph, perched before Beatrix's dressing-table, leaned forward looking critically in her mirror. And from that slender oval the same judgmental face looked out, ignoring the ultra modern luxury of the dressing-room, but with the closest attention for the prettiest creature it framed, all light, soft draperies and delicate rounded throat and arms, light little feet, and a face now so tender, now wanton, now rapt. For Beatrix was trying on expressions, and so interested had she become as she sat there alone, that the beauty of herself was lost upon her.

She had had her way, of course, about the tableaux. She had decided that they were to be given for the benefit of Dick's Boys' Club, and had interested all her friends. Her most difficult task had been to persuade Dick himself to fill the rôle her fancy had pictured for him; but she had prevailed here, too, as she knew she would, and only smiled delightedly upon his capitulation when he cried at last, "One must feel like a fool doing a stunt like that; but it's exquisite to be made fool of by you, Trixy."

Trixy laughed triumphantly to the face in the mirror, as she thought of it now, and the riotously merry face laughed back at her. It was at that moment that Tessy came in and with her quick glance at the nymph and her lovely reflection, self-consciousness came back to Trixy, that delightful sensibility of charm which always intoxicated her.

She sprang forward and caught Tessy to her. It was

almost like caressing that imprisoned, mirrored nymph, to put her lips to a face so like it. But Tessy slipped from her arms. "Don't, dear," she protested, "I've been nursing a bad case. Of course, I've changed, but ——"

Beatrice retreated from her in quick dismay. "Oh, Tessy, Tessy," she cried, "why will you keep at that nasty business and not be kissable when I love you most!"

Tessy smiled. "That was a very pretty retreat of yours, Trix: the nymph could n't do better than adopt it."

"Was it, was it really?" cried Trix, striving to repeat the movement before the mirror. "Was it this? — Or like this?"

In her fluttering scant draperies, as she practised a quick, rhythmic step, she looked a leaping figure light as fire and fluent as water, a thing all grace and sweet-cadenced action, that scarcely touched the floor it sprang from.

"Is it true Michael's gone, Trix?" Tessy asked, laying aside her coat and hat, her eyes fixed upon that light, elusive figure.

"Gone — a — way," chanted Trix in time to her own quick steps.

"Where?"

"To — Shingle — sides. On — the — is — land . . . Was n't it more like this?" she added, making a last attempt at reproduction.

Tessy shook her head impatiently. "What's it like there? Why did n't you go with him?" she demanded.

Trix turned a mutinous face toward her. "Why, I've never been there; a sort of isolated box of shingles down on the sands. Brett went with him," she added.

"Why did n't you?" repeated Tessy.

"Oh, because — because . . . Why, a nurse like

you ought to know, Therese Thorley, that doctors love to send people away from their people. It's just as well, anyway, for I've got these tableaux to think about, and I could n't be running up and down between the island and here. Do you remember, Tess," she ran on lightly, "when we were little and talking about married people having perpetually to be together, how you and Michael agreed that it must be lovely to escape? Michael's escaped — to Shinglesides. And it's ideal, for I've never been there and — don't want to go."

"That's nonsense, Trix. We were all silly. But some of us are sillier now," she added resolutely.

"Meaning me?" Trix cocked her head, that the mirrored nymph — for she had resumed her study at the dressing-table — might smile out archly upon her.

"Yes, dear."

"Michael been tattling again?" asked Trix indifferently.

Tessy shook her head. "He seems sort of estranged from me, too," she said slowly, "and I'm sorry. He's *our* Mike, Trix, your Mike, if you will, but he was ours before he became yours."

"Oh, Lordy, I wish he never had!" exclaimed Trix airily.

"He's not happy, Trixy," Tessy's voice was appealing. "Think back how we loved him, what we would have done for him!"

"He was a dandy sort of boy," said Trix critically, "but he ought n't have married me. He's no man at all!"

"Trix! What do you —"

"What sort of man is it who can't manage his own wife?" demanded Trix scornfully.

"What sort of woman is it that needs control?" retorted Tessy.

"Control!" At the word mutiny stirred in Beatrix's blood. "Control!" she repeated, and her laugh was not pleasant. "Good-bye, then, to the theories of the untamed Therese Thorley, who once said as she quoted Emerson's 'No human being is good enough to be another human being's master,' 'No man is wise enough to be a woman's tyrant.' What about that, Therese, what about that?"

Impatiently Therese shook her head; this was no time for theories. "Nothing about it, Trix, nothing," she said sharply. "It's all in this: if a woman decides to be a wife, she ought to play according to the rules of the game — if she's going to play fair. But if she's not —"

"Well, if she's not!" challenged Trix. "If she's mortally tired of the game? If she's determined to be herself, however disagreeable that self is to her husband, and no matter how he may choose to disapprove, what then, O uncompromising Therese Thorley?"

"She — she wants to be very sure," said Tessy slowly.

"She is sure."

"Sure that she'll not regret? Or that she'll not play fast and loose with a man's heart, and his work, and his life? Sure that —"

"Oh yes, sure — sure, sure!"

In the pause that followed Tessy's eyes were fixed upon her. "Then, come away with me, Trix," she said at length simply, "come for a few months anyway, without a break. You'll be surer or not so sure after that. But come away alone with me till you can think it out with no other — I mean, with. . . . Will you come?" she added hastily to hide her confusion in the unfinished sentence.

Beatrix shook her head. "It is n't necessary, Tess. I'm not that kind. I don't want to think it out; it is out. Let

Michael think; he's better at it than I am. Chances are she continued lightly, "it'll be all right. Don't you bother

"But it won't be all right, Trixy. You don't know him. Tessy's sorrowful eyes sought hers, but Beatrix affected concern for her make-up.

"Who does — you? I wish to goodness, then, you preach to him."

"I have." There was a wry smile on Tessy's lips.

"You have!" A laugh of pure delight broke from her. "Lovely!"

"I implored him to look after you, Trix. I said — was afraid you'd go too far."

"Awfully dear of you," mused Beatrix with gentle irony and still studying her mirror. "And what did he say?"

"Oh, he evaded, just like you, and pretended to belittle what we both felt was serious and, like you, Trixy, he ended with an intimation that it is all your fault."

Beatrix sniffed disdainfully. "A fine manly fellow is your brother-in-law!" she declared, with superb audacity throwing the burden of relationship, and therefore of apology for the relationship, upon her sister.

In spite of her depression Tessy laughed. She seemed to be saying at such moments as this: "There is I, myself, a lighter, gaily nonsensical self, the self I cannot be, but I can enjoy almost as much as if I were the girl Trix is."

"Of course, though —" Tessy said aloud; but she paused. And in that pause Trix, scenting the thing she had to say, looked up and their eyes met, this time without dissimulation between them. "Of course, he's right, Trix."

Beatrix jumped from her chair. "You didn't — you never told him so!" she cried.

Tessy shook her head.

"You never will?" It was a challenge and a plea — Trix's lifelong attitude, in fine, toward criticism from this one she loved, whose love for her had long ago accepted as the ultimatum of their relationship the dictum which needed no expression, so perfectly it was understood — "I may be wrong, but *you* must not admit it." As though the whole tragedy for the one lay in the other's open recognition of her error.

Again Tessy shook her head. "But that won't make any difference, Trix," she added slowly.

"Oh, yes it will," she contradicted.

"Not to a man like Michael. He'll see what I think no matter how I pretend."

"You must never let him see you think me in the wrong."

"I never will if I can help it."

"Help it! Help it? Tessy!" The incredulity in her voice was an indictment, a shocked protest as against a contemplated disloyalty, a calling upon her sister to warn her of treachery that was almost unthinkable.

"My poor Trixy!" Tessy caught her and pulled her down to the couch beside her. "Why should you *be* in the wrong? Why not make it up with Michael or — or break with him? Oh, I — I can't tell you how that would hurt me, too," she added in response to a quick, impatient movement from Trix. "But — it would hurt us all less than a trial of strength between you two. For it will come to that, dearie. Oh, yes, it will. See, Trixy, he does n't ask so much; be a dear, and conform just a bit to his wishes. They're not so . . . You won't?" For Trix's gesture of dissent was unmistakable. "Oh, but you must, honey. You must do one thing or the other."

But Beatrix only laughed, holding her sister's arms about

her as she poured forth a joyous, impertinent denial. "But I don't want to do one thing or the other!" she cried. "No one does, for that matter — except you, perhaps. We all want to do both things; that's where the attraction of living comes in. Who wants to label himself by doing one thing or the other? Not I. Why, what sort of a world would it be if people did, really did, one thing or the other — a barren, ugly place with not the ghost of a chance in it for anything to happen. Bah, Tessy, my sweet, wise old Texsy, no one on earth does or is one thing or the other, thank the good Lord, who must love variety as much as we do!"

Tessy's eyes were fixed upon her. To the forthright simplicity of the girl whom passion had not touched, there was something terribly, complexly feminine in this light and daring creature. For the first time, there came to Tess a sense of insecurity, a desire to have this beloved rebel close to her that she might guard her from something undefined, from nothing, perhaps — from herself, it might be.

"I'll tell you what, dearie," she said gently, "you come away with me for awhile, I won't ask you to do one thing or the other, or anything. Just come over to the Settlement and postpone doing anything except to work with me."

"Ugh!" A shrug of distaste lifted the warm ivory of Trix's shoulders.

"Well, then," Tessy laughed, "don't work, you lazy girl, but come anyway and —"

"And spend the time flirting desperately with Dick Matthewson?" A wicked delight shone in Beatrix's eyes.

"All right, I'll come."

"Trix!"

"Tess!" she mocked. "Do you suppose I want to play platonic with that big beauty of a boy you've never waked

up, in spite of all your opportunities? I was always half in love with him. You've a genius for platonic friendships, you know. I have n't."

"Oh — and what is your genius for?" The question was ironical, impatient.

"Oh, I just want my own motif, that's all," Trix laughed, "something light and spirited with a hint of trouble in it, of danger, perhaps, but full, full of life, of action. . . . A fine idea! I'll make Dick compose it and sing it for me — the motif of me. You must n't be cross, Tess, if I can't copy yours. Ugh! it's monotonous, I could n't bear it. You're everybody's dear, dear sister, you know, mine and Michael's and Dick's — are you going to be Mr. Johns's sister, too, I wonder?" she added softly malicious.

The red leaped to Tessy's cheek. Trix's eyes danced when she saw it, and she laid a velvet little hand upon it. "Are you really going to care for that old man, Tess?" she asked. "It's like you to reject a young god like Dick and then —"

"Who told you?" gasped Tessy.

"Who but the Rev.-Dick himself? . . . How in the world could you say 'no' to him?" Trix questioned curiously.

"We did n't really care that way for each other," Tess answered slowly. "It was when he was all in love with holiness, dear boy, and — and I think his fancied love for me was part of that; he — he was in love with my reputation," she added with a little explanatory laugh, "and you know how consistently I've objected to accepting all sorts of goods under false pretenses."

Trix nodded, but quickly she shook her head dissenting. "I don't know," she said musingly, "there must be something of the saint in a girl that could say 'no' to Dick Matthewson. Really, did n't you love him, Tess?"

"Indeed I did and do," she said, and a quick cry broke from Trix. "He's dear as a brother to both of us, Trix," she added steadily. "Don't you — spoil him — don't you!"

"The sister-motif again!" Trix grimaced. "Why, any woman he looks at twice with those blue eyes of his must spoil him. Every girl I've introduced him to is mad about him. Daisy Varney would throw Count Max over in a minute if Dick would say two words to her."

"Why does n't he?"

Trix's gold eyebrows lifted. "She says it's my fault," she pouted prettily.

"Trixy — Trixy, I don't like it!"

"Would you rather she'd complain of my keeping Count Max from her?" she inquired with the air of one trying to be patient with most unreasonable exaction.

"I'll not have you speak your name with his!" cried Tess in sharp exasperation.

Beatrix's eyes opened wide; she had never heard that tone from Tessy. But immediately they twinkled in lazy appreciation. "Do you hate him, Tess?" she asked, "do you hate him?"

"Yes — I do," said Tess stoutly.

"Well — this is a secret; promise you won't tell Michael — promise?" And when Tessy nodded, she added enjoyingly, "Well, so do I, with all my heart, the vicious little foreign beast! I'm never going to see him again after these tableaux are over."

"But why won't you tell that to Michael?"

"For the very, very, very best little reason in the world."

"Do you — you do love him, Trixy, after all?" breathed Tess in a joyous whisper.

"Heavens, no, you silly! I don't. One might as well love Archibald Johns himself. Do you — Tessy?"

Tessy put out two hands and, holding the saucy face opposite her, looked into its eyes. "I wonder, Trix," she said under her breath, "if you 're a wicked girl!"

"I wonder if I am!" The exclamation was half involuntary and Trix's lashes drooped, hiding the twinkling eyes into which Tessy had looked in vain. "Grandfather Peter Thorley always thought so, you know," she went on with a quick return to flippancy, "and he was a wise old man," she sang, paraphrasing the chorus of a popular song.

It jarred upon Tessy. She rose and caught up her hat.

But Trix's quick fingers anticipated her. "Now, now, you're not cross and you're not going away, Texsy," she coaxed, putting an arm about her and pulling her down beside her. "I did n't mean to be heartless, surely I did n't. You may think me wicked, but you know I'm not cruel. Say you know it."

But Tessy was silent; she was most unhappy, uneasiness possessed her, an anxiety she dared not define.

"It takes good people like you to be cruel," declared Trix, offended.

"Don't — don't you count too much on that goodness in me, Trix Thorley!" Tessy turned suddenly upon her, her voice vibrating with the emotion that caught her.

But at the look of utter amazement in Trix's face, she smiled, though with lips that quivered a bit, said her headache had made her cross, and let herself be coaxed and petted into good-humour. And Trix was famous at coaxing; she had an irresistible, musical method of her own, which, beginning with a soft *andante*, finished in a rapid and brilliant *tacato*, under cover of which she generally contrived so to

reverse rôles that she was in a position to demand favours at the end, with which to cement and celebrate reconciliation.

In this case the celebration took the form of Tessy's presence at a dinner, which Beatrix had arranged to precede the evening's entertainment, and which was originally intended to include only the participants in the coming tableaux.

"But now that you're going to be a dear, and stay, I'll get another man. . . . Oh, I know," Trix clapped her hands in self-congratulation, "I'll ring up Mr. Johns and ask him." With the impulsiveness of a child excited by anticipation of festivities to come, she caught up the telephone.

"But, Trixy," protested Tess, "what in the world will a man like that do among the giddy boys and girls you've invited?"

"He'll talk to the woman of brains, of course," remarked Beatrix saucily, in the interval of her negotiations for her number.

"Nonsense! He won't come."

"Nonsense!" echoed Trix gaily. "Wait till he hears the woman of brains is going to be here and I tell him ——"

"Then you must n't ask him."

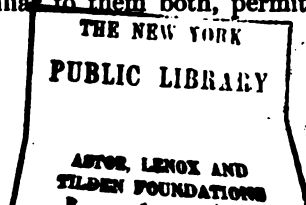
"Then I must because ——" She broke off to begin her conversation with Johns, a hesitant, gracious monologue, with a prettily casual mention of her chief attraction and a soft little murmur of an untold something of importance which she could only communicate personally.

This communication Johns listened to in amazement, when he arrived that evening and, listening, found that he had never liked his friend's wife half so well as he did in those few minutes when, in the same captivating frock in which she had posed as her sister, she confessed the imposition.

"It was just a silly little impulse," she concluded, with an irresistible air of impatience with herself, of contrition that was obviously not very deep, but still seemed lightly genuine. "I began it in fun, I think — I really think I did, Mr. Johns, and went on with it from sheer perversity. I am so sorry; it would be awfully good of you to forgive me and take the real Therese (who does n't know a word about it all) in to dinner as a peace-offering from me and a thank-offering from you. There — is it a bargain?"

She held out a hand which his was quick to grasp; Johns was realizing for the first time the charm of the graceful, butterfly creature in this mood of pouting penitence and self-castigation, so naively tempered to its delicate task that even the most fragile, quivering lepidopterous wings would not have been injured by it.

Or it might have been, he said to himself later as he looked into Therese Thorley's face, a reflection of that warm content which glorified his world now that he sat beside her again after the intervening weeks of doubt and disappointment. And yet he noted, or seemed to note, a subtle change wrought in those weeks. She was paler to-night than usual, less animated. To his sensitive mind it was as though the shadow of undeserved suspicion, though banished from his own thoughts, had left some blur between them, some slight but tangible obstacle that had not been there when first they two had met and discovered that rare mutual sympathy, impossible to counterfeit. To overcome this — if indeed it existed outside the fancy of a generous soul eager for atonement — Johns bent all the talents of an excellent mind, a full experience, and a varied, warm nature. The noisy gaiety of the company in which he found himself, and its absorption in details unfamiliar to them both, permitted him to



monopolize her and set them apart in a precious isolation of which he made his opportunity.

That opportunity, he knew intuitively, as well as from the comradeship he had noted between her and Michael, lay in making of their dual friendship an intimately bound trinity. And so, with a confidential expansion strange to his strong and compact habit of thought, he unfolded to her his plans for his friend. He had his reward in the delight that lit up her face and parted her lips, delicately curved and tinted as a scarlet geranium; and, inspired by that sympathetic unity of interest, he talked well and fluently, sharing with her, as he had hitherto shared with none, details of his work and its scope, half-formed schemes and cloudy hopes that cleared, it seemed to him, before the pure fire of eyes glowing with intelligence and soft with accord and appreciation.

It was when he came to denunciation of unscrupulous wealth, as he inevitably did, that Tessy glanced across the table to Daisy Varney, a passion-orchid radiant in lace and jewels, a triumphantly beautiful worldling in her aura of betrothal, recently announced, to the titled Austrian at her side, whose whole attention was bestowed with a certain enjoying malice upon his hostess, who neglected him, in her turn, for Dick Matthewson.

"I know." Johns attributed the trouble in the face he loved to a tender-hearted sympathy. "This is a flower, this woman, blossoming gorgeously in society's sunshine; but its roots, the tenacious family roots of it, are hidden in the blackness of unexposed corruption. But work like mine — like ours, may I not say?" he added, yielding to his longing to associate her with himself—"is impersonal. We are instruments of retribution, single-minded because we have found at last, and after wearying, baffling false clues, the malefactor

whose crimes poison our wellspring, the conscienceless, predatory man of millions, the century Blackbeard, the incarnated bogy of civilization whose tastes, habits, personalities may differ, but whose purpose is always the same — to take more than his due, to resist restitution, to evade justice. . . . Will you give your help to this?" he asked suddenly. "I hear you have, through your charity to his wife, some influence with this fellow Brocato; will you use it some day when I ask it of you?"

She assented brightly as they rose from the table, and he was content for the present with the nature of the link between them. It was Count Max's thick-tongued English that broke upon their silence, for both were thoughtful in the midst of the merry company getting quickly into wraps and preparing to set out immediately for the theatre. "You do not take part, they tell me, Miss Thorley," he said joining them, "in these pretty tableaux. I am sorry. The ladies are living pictures, we realize it only too well, and the stage frame but enhances their picturesqueness and piquancy. But modern males are so unfortunate, so unbeautiful. My part is only to direct the electrician as to the tableaux lights. It takes a thick-skinned giant, like that young Matthewson, to enter a men's beauty-contest, eh?"

"Dick Matthewson does n't enter a beauty-contest, Count Thuri," said Tessy, the light of battle in her eye; "he is it."

"It? Is it?" repeated the Austrian puzzled.

"He is the whole contest — that's what I mean," explained Tessy, displeased with herself for such an estimate, yet driven perversely to make it.

"So!" exclaimed Count Max, bending an inquiring look upon her.

"But that 's a nonsensical thing to say of Dick," she added quickly. "I 'm sorry I ——"

"What is?" Dick's voice came from above stairs whither he had been sent on some commission by Beatrix. As he turned at the landing directly overhead he caught Tessy's words. "What have you been saying about me, Therese?" he demanded gaily.

To each of the three for the moment, watching that light, strong figure hurrying down the stairs, came a new sense of its muscular perfection, its boyish beauty. To the Austrian it came as an unwelcome justification of its attraction for women. To Johns it brought a pang, an acknowledgment that the girl by his side looking up at this fine, youthful creature coming toward her was young, too, and looking with the eyes of youth upon it; he could not see that Tessy's eyes were questioning, pitiful, and pleading, like those of one who is afraid to look into the future. Yet so gallant a body it was, as it slipped from step to step, so strong the shoulders and so nobly set the fair head above them that, long after, the three remembered that night and saw Dick Matthewson in the glory of young manhood coming down the stairs.

He was flushed and almost boisterously high-spirited; of abstemious habit, pleasure intoxicated him when he drank deep of it. And there was that waking in Dick that bade him drink, drink; in the band of merry-makers that danced on gaily in Trixy's wake, there was none her mate but this thirsty-lipped young anchorite whose bonds her magic had broken.

"Dare to say it again, Tess!" he cried, stooping audaciously over her.

But she caught her hands from him and spoke sharply. "I don't like you, Dick, when you 're mad as this."

"But you did n't like me, either, when I was sane," he retorted. "What did she say, Thuri?"

"We were merely discussing your chances in a beauty-contest," drawled Count Max.

"Just commenting with the natural envy of undesirables, Matthewson," put in Johns with a humorous touch, "on the folly of Nature in giving all the brains to me, and all the wit to Count Thuri here, which leaves nothing but muscle for you, poor lad!"

"Ah!" Dick turned his back on the Austrian and smiled, comprehending. "I see. It's the tableaux you were criticising — that it, Tessy? Well! Of course it is ridiculous for a man, and one does feel like an ass, but I was foolishly wise when other fellows were wisely fools and — and it's delightful to be made a fool of by Trixy. What, have I said that before?" He laughed at her quick movement of displeasure. "Well, get on your things, Tess, Trix says, and come and watch me make a fool of myself. You're to be in our car." And singing out, in his clear baritone, the Wooing Shepherd song he had chosen for the accompaniment to their little pantomime, he brought her to Beatrix.

Count Max's eyes followed them. "Will Mrs. Thwaites marry her sister to this pretty boy," he asked, "just to keep him in the family?"

Johns turned. "I can't tell you what Mrs. Thwaites's intentions are concerning her sister," he said curtly.

"So!" commented the Count with his air of suggestive deliberation. And then, as Johns was about to leave him, "I am to have the pleasure, Mrs. Thwaites tells me, of taking you to the theatre in my machine."

"Oh — thank you."

The invitation was not welcome, but there seemed no way

out of it. In the tonneau half a dozen people were already packed, and Johns took his place beside its owner, who drove. It pleased Count Max as he drove, with a reckless skill that was admirable and terrifying, to continue a conversation Johns did not encourage: and, though speech at such a pace in the crowded street was not easy, and had to be conducted in a series of brief, quickly interrupted sentences, he held to it with a tenacity which his listener's quite evident taciturnity could not deter.

"We're all beauty mad," he growled, "women as well as men. One feels toward that Matthewson as a Hungarian peasant woman I knew must have felt when she threw vitriol in the village beauty's face."

"I don't," remarked Johns dryly.

"So?" demanded the Count. "Well, wait till he takes a woman away from you just when you have begun to trouble her thoughts, when you can see your way straight ahead and ——"

"You can't literally see yours very far just now," interrupted Johns.

"I can see farther than you think," his companion returned significantly and, opening the throttle, he sent his car speeding ahead till, after a swift moment's race, a shriek of laughter and of terror from the women in both automobiles, it had distanced the limousine, in which were the other half of the party. "I can see, for instance," he continued unpleasantly, "that it is Mrs. Thwaites who sits beside the beautiful Dick in front, and not Miss Thorley. You — now — would not know them apart."

"Oh, yes, I should," contradicted Johns promptly.

The Austrian laughed. "And yet I know of my own knowledge a time when you could not tell the difference."

"You're mistaken," said Johns.

The Count looked up quickly, swerved to the left and turned a corner, just grazing a street-car that jangled on amid curses from its motor-man. "You mean you think I am," he said.

"I mean I know you are."

"In yonder," the Count said, nodding toward the brightly lighted Italian café they were passing — "the electric sign is what reminded me of it — you thought Miss Thorley was dining with me a month or so ago."

"I did not," said Johns.

"You did not? So!"

"I did not," repeated Johns. "I knew you thought I did at the time. You were deceived by the lady's innocent little play, as you thought I was. But I don't care to discuss it."

"So!" Count Max was silent a moment, busying himself with his car; it was quite in his ordinary voice that he resumed. "She has then confessed the innocent little play to you?"

Johns did not answer.

"For an innocent little reason," added his companion.

Johns did not speak.

"So!" murmured the Count communing with himself. "How she moves us about like pawns in her innocent little game," he went on as though trying to think out a problem. "There is one possibility that would make your knowing the truth important. Perhaps you can —"

"I have concluded that I can't," Johns interrupted with some decision. "I can't —" In the moment's silence that followed he had recast the thing he was about to say. "After all, I find I can't spare the time to attend this performance. An engagement I'd forgotten. If you will

set me down here — yes, just after you turn the corner, I shall be obliged to you.”

Count Max shrugged his shoulders and brought his car to a stop beside the curb. “Shall I make your excuses,” he asked sardonically as Johns stepped out, waiting for the second car to come up, “to Mrs. Thwaites or to Miss Thorley?”

But Johns himself halted the limousine when, a moment later, Beatrix, a skilful little chauffeur, drove it around the corner. He pleaded an important matter which he had suddenly recalled, and took his leave.

Beatrix looked after him, for a second, as the two cars ran on together. Then she spoke to Dick sitting beside her. “You know, Dick,” she said under her breath, “I — made it right with Mr. Johns, about it ’s not being Tess, but me, at the café that night — you remember?”

“Good! That was fine of you, Trix.” Dick spoke, his glowing face bent close to listen.

She shot a swift glance up at him. “Was it?” she questioned. “Oh, was it, Dick? — I don’t know. I wish — I hope it was.”

“You hope?”

She nodded, but she did not lift her eyes again from the street along which the lamps’ light streamed. “Did I tell him, Dick,” she whispered, “out of justice to Tess, or because — because ——”

“Because what?” he demanded, his hand for a moment on hers that held the wheel. “Because what, Trix?”

“Because of — some other reason. Because I know he loves her and if she ——” She broke off suddenly. “I don’t know for sure,” she added, in an agitated voice.

"If ever I'm sure of any other motive, I'll tell you, Dick, I promise—I will, sure, no matter. . . . Oh, here we are—I'm so glad!" She swung the car about and stopped it.

As Dick lifted her out, he tried to look into her eyes, but she hurried into the theatre, and he followed, curiously, causelessly agitated himself.

CHAPTER XIV

AS HE took his place alone upon the semi-darkened stage — the pantomime of the nymph and the shepherd was supposed to take place at dusk, just before moonrise — Dick Matthewson was not so sure of the delight of making a fool of oneself. A sense of the absurdity of theatricism, which had been growing upon him since he beheld himself in his glass attired in the inconsequential costume of a shepherd of the Golden Age, culminated now in a feeling of strong distaste. In this revolt of common sense, he marvelled at his consenting to put himself in such a position; and he waited with almost panicky apprehension for the lifting of the curtain which screened a fool like himself, as he phrased it mentally, from the normally clad world beyond, that had had balance enough to refrain from taking part in this absurd masquerade.

But all that was left for him to do in the hurrying interim was to compose and reconcile himself as best he could; to determine that no betrayal of his personal appreciation of the ludicrousness of the situation should let ridicule loose upon him; and to thank fortune for the fact that the whole of the action of the little performance — up to the very end when the moon should rise over the rescue of her devotee — was to take place in a soft half-light.

It was despite his impatience with it all that this ficti-

tious but tender twilight affected him, soothed him, and played him into tune; played upon him indeed as did the little melody, now so softly beginning. For his was a temperament finely susceptible to poetry and beauty, and the musician in him was in itself an outstretched hand welcoming the effect created by the oboe's sweetly simple, hollow notes. So, with the melody murmuring through the half-dusk, so tender to illusion, he yielded to the charm of unreality and laid himself, resigned yet receptive, down upon a bank; for the curtain rises upon the shepherd lying alone asleep, to be discovered later by a certain, curious, timorous, but daring nymph.

Not till Dick felt that light presence near him, a breath, perhaps only a flutter of delicate draperies, was the miracle wrought for him; but then suddenly, all at once reality became very unreal, became the literal materiality which is the less true for its tangible truth. His eyelids fluttered, but before he had seen her, he felt upon them a touch light as though a satin leaf, floating down, had dropped upon them and bid them close. Then he remembered his promise to keep dramatic faith and aid illusion by not looking upon her until the time set by the pantomime for the shepherd to see the nymph whose presence he divines.

In those short, still moments that he lay there waiting, it seemed to Dick, all the grace of that age-long golden day when "men did not think that happy things were dreams" descended upon him. His was only a few moments' isolation, yet like some Arcadian deity returned from long banishment, he thought he found again things strange and sweetly familiar in the wild, free air he breathed, in nymph-peopled forests and dryad-haunted streams his

closed eyes looked upon, in a glad, great world full, brimming over with beauty and sensuous delight, a-tune with song, a-play with pleasure, and all alight with the passion of love.

Young — young — young you are, his bounding pulses cried to him. The Golden Age, the glorious age, with its love and laughter, the halcyon time of poetry and mirth and lightheartedness, the flowered fields, gold-sunned through and through and warmly, passionately sweet, the radiant air, the lovely, immortal, faulty gods, the brimming life that thrilled through tree and rock and river, the abounding beauty that was a birthright, the intoxicating joy of being, the mad, glad dance the senses knew, the lovely lawlessness of it all — you have it all within you!

And, as he seemed to sleep with that light presence hovering over him — Dick Matthewson waked. And in him waked that Pan who is not dead, whom thousands of civilized years upon years cannot kill, but who shall live as long as youth is born young and marches to manhood to the drumming of the pulses, the music of those pipes whose throb starts boys' blood to sweet, wild tumult and a glorious madness. In that awakening, the lusty world of human deities and godlike mortals and soulless nymphs and smiling satyrs, that fluent spirit of licentious beauty which made all nature's forms, as it were, mercurially alive and interchangeable, before self-consciousness came and humanity monopolized the new god-gift — the immortally adolescent world wakes too, again; is recreated in a boy's heart.

It takes a poet to interpret it, or a lover, and in that enchanted moment Dick was both — a dumb poet for he

might not speak, a nascent lover even yet unaware. He could not have told in worlds how that exquisite unseen presence stirred him; how it approached; how it fled; how he felt its nearness as something so keenly rapturous he could with difficulty restrain himself from crying to her; how when it vanished, as he sprang to his feet, he had that pagan sense of emptiness the native earth knew before it dreamed of immortality; how strangely real the play had come to be; how absurdly fanciful that dark world of watchers beyond to which his ears were deaf, his eyes blind. All he heard was the plaintive air of the wood-instruments he simulated with his pipes (and was so bewitched he was not conscious he did not make the music) and the light, tumultuous rush of a concealed orchestra so soft, so rhythmic, with a syncopation that was akin to the catch in his own breath and the flutter of his heart, that loudened as she danced behind him and died into silence when she disappeared.

All that he could see in that twilight that encompassed them was the glow of a sun that, sinking, transformed their little enclosed world and left its warm glow like a benediction behind it. But he was conscious to the uttermost of the thing he could not see, the picture he had been forbidden to look upon; and that very caprice of hers worked now like a charm, stimulating imagination, pricking at fancy till, as he stood there, tense with listening, his uplifted face became inspired, as though divining the light psyche-like loveliness and grace embodied, and bewitchingly transforming the girl he had known all his life into something maddeningly strange and desirable, a creature all fascination, endowed with irresistible charm, muse, nymph,

goddess all in one, the very incarnation of that time, the glad springtime of humanity.

All through the little play of advance and retreat, of affected despair and illuminating hope, of grief at her mockery, of angry pride and resentment of her caprice, he went, not mechanically, though half-conscious only that he followed the plan; in the glamour that had come upon him it seemed to him he could not do otherwise. When, in a quick movement of escape, she dropped the wreath of daisies her hands had idly woven as, invisible to him, she listened to his music, it was not as god-disguised shepherd he seized it and crowned his own fair head, but as Dick, Dick Matthewson valuing the thing she had wrought, hungry to touch the flowers that had wreathed her in their caress, craving something that was herself in this that had been hers.

When he thought of it later poor Dick was sure that he must have, at the proper moment, cast aside his pipes in despair at her gay elusiveness, and thrown himself sobbing down upon the bank where she had found him; then she relented and drew near and, at a gesture, retreated like a startled bird. Then he must have risen with a boyish air of wrath and marched away from her, his head held haughtily erect, the pipe at his lips and the melody grown bolder, stronger, not so wooing, and no longer plaintive. She followed more closely than she yet had dared, as though curious, excited, but more apprehensive; and so quick was his turn upon her at the end that all that was left to her was to out-flank him. So that when he turned again, she stood poised in his path, cornered, trembling, capitulating, bending low with one lovely little uplifted arm to shield her, as though a bird trailing a wing fluttered before him, timid, fearful, yet fascinated — adoring — offering.

What came after that Dick hardly knew. His body was thrilling as though every pulse had been set to music, for he had touched her for an instant before she leaped from him, and now he beheld her set above him in the prismatic play of the lights that dripped and plashed and fell — a glorified fountain enfolding, veiling, revealing, but dividing him from this panting, transformed Arethusa.

"Trixy," he stammered. "Oh — Trix!"

"Yes — yes, Dick, I know," she breathed bending forward. Her words were infinitely tender and gentle, as though she comprehended in a dream, and dreamed she spoke the answer.

And then the world seemed to come to an end, or it might have for all Dick cared, for the lights went out suddenly and he had her in his arms.

When Tessy made them hear her they were standing as though bewitched, and even when the lights flared up again unexpectedly they did not move. She herself was dazzled; terrified, too, by the sudden illumination which seemed to come with malevolence at this inopportune moment, as though someone who was responsible for it had knowledge, greater even than that of these two, so helplessly discovered, of possibilities and capacities, which she herself had only vaguely dreamed of.

And yet, in her bewilderment and trouble, she at once blamed herself for her blindness and accused herself of having seen yet refused to recognize the danger. There was but one thing to do, she decided, and her action was so unhesitating and immediate that when she pushed Trix into the wings, wrapping about herself the cloak she had been holding ready to cover her and, seizing Dick's hand stepped forward, the

cheering audience saw only two figures; not the three who had stood in that circle of passionate gladness and sorrow and stupefaction.

"They did not see — they could not see!" she kept repeating under her breath to Dick as, his cold hand in hers, they stood bowing to the applauding crowd.

"I don't know," he murmured brokenly.

"Perhaps somebody in the wings, but if they did — it must be me they saw, Dick, not her — not her!" She pressed his fingers with all her strength, striving to rouse him, to make him comprehend.

"Anything — anything —" He tried to release his hand. "I — must get away!"

"Are you mad?" she whispered.

"Yes, Tess — mad and drunk and miserable. Let me go!"

"I could strike you across the face, Dick Matthewson, before them all for being such a coward," she gasped. "But —"

"I wish you would," he half sobbed.

"But instead, Dick," she went on, putting her whole soul in the significance of her quick words, and leaning toward him to emphasize them, "I'm pretending — I'm trying to make them believe it was me — do you hear? Me — not Trix. If — if you're not even a greater scoundrel than I think you, if you've got any goodness or kindness in your disloyal soul, help me — help me, Dick!"

The misery in her voice reached him; he remembered dully what a soft voice it was, how delicately modulated, how caressingly, liltily gentle, and its hoarse, strained accent: shocked him now into thinking of another than himself — himself and his love's self. "Tessy — dear little Tessy —"

he murmured, putting his hand fondly over the one that held his. "God forgive me, I never thought to hurt you."

She smiled; it was a ghastly little smile, but it sufficed, for the curtain fell at last and they stumbled from the stage. When Count Max Thuri and his fiancée intercepted them in the wings, both were calmer; it seemed to Tessy that to meet the smiling malice in the Austrian's eyes, to be fit for this moment, was what all her life had builded up to.

"I must beg your pardon, Madame, about the lights; the stupid fellow misunderstood my orders," he began, and then stopped. "Ah, it is—is it Miss Thorley?" he asked abruptly.

Tessy nodded. She was struggling with a dual feeling of benumbed misery and of mad excitement in the effort she was making.

"Why, Therese Thorley!" exclaimed Mrs. Varney with a little cry of surprise, "Then you and Dick, after all ——"

"Yes." Again Tessy nodded. A brilliant red burned her cheeks and her feverish eyes defied the Count's as she looked straight into them. "Dick and I, after all!"

"My congratulations," said Count Max dryly. "And it is then to you I must address my apologies for that embarrassing illumination. You see, the man misunderstood. You forgive me?"

"Oh, of course! To-night" — her face was radiant, so satisfied she was, so joyously content with her success — "I've no grudge against even the electrician's stupidity. Have we, Dick?" she prompted.

"No — no, it merely hastened an announcement of the engagement I was anxious to have made public long ago, Thuri. One would n't choose just — just this way, but — I'm glad from my soul, I'm glad it's done."

The words were spoken with profound seriousness, and his manner as, lifting the cloak that had fallen to Tessy's shoulders, he put it about her and led her away, was so lovingly sincere, that Daisy Varney caught her breath and looked after them wistfully, watching till the stage-door closed behind them. There Dick lifted Tessy into the carriage and, taking his seat beside her, shut the door behind them.

"Make it true, Tessy," he said, leaning forward and taking her hands; it seemed to him years had passed since that golden nymph flamed out at him from a glowing, many-coloured fountain that bore lights as a tree might roses.

She looked over at him; the colour had gone from her face, it looked pinched and gray, and her eyes held a steadfast sadness that hurt him.

"Oh, if you could make it true, dear," he begged. "We could go away, you and I, and you'd be my dear, dear comrade, and we'd work, we two, for the things we care for. The world is always full for helpful little hands like these. I was honest in what I said to that blackguard. Long ago, you know, I wanted you. I want you — differently — now. You said you did n't care that way, that you never would — remember? Well — neither do I — now. But, oh, if you could marry me, Tess, and come away!"

"When do you go?" she asked, and withdrew her hands.

He could not answer for a moment; in that withdrawal he felt so keen and desolating a sense of desertion, as though he must put behind him not only his manhood's friends, but the very memories of his childhood. "To-morrow," he said finally.

"Where?"

"I don't know. I'll probably not be able to make a

steamer here. I'll run up to Boston and stay there till a sailing day."

"The night train?" she asked.

He nodded.

"I — I asked," she continued slowly, "because Michael is back. I saw him for a moment at the theatre."

He stared at her as though incredulous that she could speak his friend's name to him.

"Wait," she hurried on. "I had only a few words with him. I was coming to tell Trix that he was there when — when I — when you —" Her voice struggled and died away. She buried her head in her hands, weeping bitterly.

He leaned over, seeking to comfort her. "You were so brave, dear," he murmured.

"I had to be," she sobbed, "but what I — I did, it seems now, as I think over it — was it overstrained, perhaps? I don't know. . . . But I don't care. Oh, Dick — Dick, what are we going to do!"

His face seemed to grow old as he sat watching her in silence; she looked up finally, and the misery in it went to her heart. "Let me try to tell you what I began to say," she said slowly, fighting for composure. "I'm afraid there is something more serious the trouble with his eyes, with Michael's eyes, than he has told us. He — he thought I was Trix. He confused Mr. Burke with Bert Willaby till they were quite close. But he wants to perform that operation on Limpety Jim to-morrow morning. He was insistent upon that in the moment we had together. He said that we were to expect him at nine and have the boy ready, and — and as Jim vows he'll never take ether from anybody's hand but yours —"

"I'd rather blow my brains out," he interrupted sharply.

She nodded.

"Meet him — meet Michael!" he gasped, and added with a bitter laugh, "Oh, no. I'm not so able a scoundrel as that!"

Again she nodded.

"Dear Tessy," he murmured, leaning toward her, "I'd like you to know that I — that we — we did n't know, she and I. It came upon us — just at that instant, and —" He stopped, and a wave of shame and fiery delight burned his fair skin. It was a lie that he had been saying; in that moment he knew it, for suddenly it was revealed to him why it was that Beatrix had acknowledged her masquerade to Johns.

He buried his face in his hands and a mad song of desire chased hotly through his veins, beat at his wrists and hummed in his ears. In the blackness, as he closed his eyes, there started forth a nymph of gold and passion-sweet beauty shining in the heart of a fountain with vari-coloured lights tinting its falling spray. He should see that vision as long as he lived, he cried to himself, in terror and rapture; every time he closed his eyes it would be there. Oh, if he could but keep them closed forever and that picture shut within them!

Dully, after that, he acceded to all that Tessy had to say; he could not hear her words for the plashing singing of the fountain in his ears. He did not try to speak; he strove to appear as though listening to her instructions and mutely agreeing to them. His eyes were fixed upon her, but with the pained intentness of one who strains his senses to understand. And when he closed the door of the Settlement upon her, he could have leaped into the air, so great was the reaction from self-control. He set off on a run, and sped along the silent, dark streets with a body that craved only fatigue, and

a mind which, seared with the flame of passion, was almost non-sentient. Whenever he approached a lighted corner he turned from it; when his legs lagged under him, he walked for a bit till he could run again; when the soles of his feet began to ache and smart, he dragged one after the other; he limped; he crawled. Morning found him exhausted, hatless, coatless, lying beside the railroad track far up the line, still mercilessly awake, wishing only, as each train dashed by, that he had retained strength enough to throw himself across the rails.

"But where 's the Rev.-Dick?" asked Limpety Jim for the twentieth time.

Tessy bent over him, as he lay outstretched. "I promise you, Jim, he 'll come to see you when it 's over. I 've sent for him. Indeed I have."

The boy fretted. His tears fell on the sheet stretched over his twisted body. "'T ain't like him to t'row a fellow down," he sniffled. "He always said he 'd stand by me when de time came, an' now he ain't here."

"I 'm sorry." His nurse's hand wiped away the tears. "If you say so, Limpety, it need n't be done."

"You mean we can wait till to-morrow?" he asked eagerly.

"Dick won't be here to-morrow," she said slowly. "He 's going away."

"But to come back?"

She shook her head.

A great sense of loss came upon the boy. "Den what 's de good o' gettin' your legs straight an' even, if you can't go walkin' wid him!" he demanded bitterly.

She stroked his hair and waited.

"Ain't he even goin' to say good-bye to all us fellows?" he cried.

Slowly she shook her aching head. But these unreasonable childish demands did not try her patience. Somehow it seemed to recreate and rehabilitate the beautiful boy she had known so long, this cripple's love that found him worthy, that yearned for him with a feeling so intense as to negative the shyness and hardness of the streets.

"But ye say, 'pon your soul, he'll come to see me *af-*ter the saw-bones gets t'rough wid me?" he asked *at* length.

"I promise I'll not let him go away without seeing you, Jim," she said steadily, "'pon my soul!"

He looked at her a moment, searchingly, threateningly, *as* though defying her to tell an untruth. Then he turned *his* face, hiding it in the pillow, from which came his muffled words, "All right. Go on, den. But — mind ye git him *in* here."

When Michael and his assistants came, Tessy was standing *at* the boy's head, her hand holding his.

"It is n't necessary that you should see this thing, Tess," he said to her with a glance at the other nurses.

She looked up at him, her sense of estrangement terribly multiplied by the revelation of the night before. "I've promised Jim," she said formally. "You know he relied on —" She did not say Dick's name; the blood leaped to her face as, suddenly she became aware of the pathos of those short-ranged eyes looking out at her from behind the dark glasses. When Michael removed them to put on others for the operation, he saw her pallor that followed the receding flush.

"But you're not well," he protested gently.

She shook her head like one who carries a weight that may not be shaken off. His kindness hurt her as though it was she who had betrayed him. During the past months when they had drifted apart, she had yearned to have him back again as the fond, big brother; but now she cried within herself that she could not, could not bear to have him kind. "I've been nursing a hard diphtheria case," she said abruptly. "I'll be all right. . . . Shall we begin?"

He nodded and, turning from her, gave his orders. It wounded him more than he had thought possible, this attitude of detachment in one upon whose strong sense of justice he had implicitly relied; it gave him an intolerable feeling of having been slandered, and a quick realization of how irremediably he might be hurt in her estimation, how defenceless he was, and how inevitably would lie this girl's choice between him and his wife. In spite of his philosophy and his acknowledgment that, given the bond between the sisters, or even one much weaker, no other result could be expected, he rebelled. She should have been different, he said to himself. The Therese Thorley he had known since babyhood should have been bigger than convention and braver than loyalty; the very qualities that distinguished her justified the more exacting standard. In her defection he had a consciousness of additional bitterness; he said to himself that he was mistaken in supposing he had exhausted the possibilities for unhappiness in his domestic affairs.

But work came to cut short so unprofitable a train of thought, the first work Michael had done in months. The poor little twisted body before him roused in him that old, ever-new sensation of attacking and subduing evil; he had felt it the first time he performed the operation which had since made him famous; and he felt every time in the hundreds

of similar cases that passed through his hands, that sane and normal indignation at a physical deformity which for centuries mankind endured without hope of betterment. It was for cripples long dead and dust this surgeon's heart ached while he molded living limbs to the pattern Nature designed; it was for lives lived out in needless anguish, long years uselessly, leadenly hampered, that he grieved and could not be comforted, while calmly, as though molding clay instead of sentient muscle and cracking bone, he bent over his patient.

A glory in him came upon Tessy as she watched. She had sickened at first and had feared to faint; but like a wholesome breath of fresh air came the afterthought of satisfaction, of pride in his workmanship; an impersonal pride, thank God, not linked by a relationship which seemed to sear her every time she dwelt upon it, but a professional reverence as for something so fine and fit, one almost shared by appreciation in what it accomplished.

She was so moved that she lingered with him a moment in the inner room while the nurses took the boy away. "Michael," she said, stretching out her hands, "I was never so glad of you in my life."

He took both hands in his and held them to him as though welcoming back something he had lost. "It is well done, Tess," he said slowly, looking into her eager face from which enthusiastic sympathy had banished self-consciousness. "I'm glad, very, very glad, for it's the last one I shall ever do."

"Michael!" It was a poignant, low-voiced exclamation.

He nodded, looking from her to his case of instruments lying open before him. "Strange, is n't it, to develop affection for such a monstrosity of civilization as that?" he asked with a smile, as he rested his hand caressingly upon the box.

"It's the eyes, Tess," he said simply, shutting the case; "they're done for."

"Oh — oh, no!" she stammered.

"Hush — hush, dear," he said quietly. "It's not total, perhaps it need never be, but you know that a man who would use those fine steel things must have eyes as fine and perfectly adapted. Those who serve in dangerous places must have senses unfalteringly true. I knew I could do this work to-day, for I've been lying on my back for weeks with pressure bandages and dilated pupils. The black cloud's not so black to-day. But it's only temporary; the area of perfect sight is growing less. I prefer to quit — on time. . . . Don't grieve, Tessy, — though I love to have you care."

But the memory of the miracle he had wrought under her very eyes was too strong upon her; she could but cry out against Fate's bewildering caprice which set aside from a suffering world's service the hand most skilled in relieving it.

He listened in silence; her stammered words of grief and protest were precious to him. But his was not a nature to spend itself upon futilities; he had had time to meet and face the issue which was new to her, and he had already accepted a life without the occupation, the hope, and the reward which had been so much to him. When he spoke there was little effort in his voice; it told of the calmness of one who has conquered by submission.

"It's been always coming, you must remember, Tess, all my life. I'm almost glad it's here. And, if you'll think it over long and alone, as I have, you'll get to look at it as one might at a storm that threatens so long on the horizon one's nerves are really relieved when it breaks. . . . Come,

come, dear, surely you think me strong enough to bear anything I have to!"

The phrase struck her; she shivered, and then, suddenly, looked up at him. He was strong; might he not be even stronger than she had hoped? In his face, as he met her glance, she could trace lines deeply graven, and about his temples the hair was already gray; but strength was still the dominant note in a physiognomy softened but unweakened by trial.

An impulse came to her to throw all her perplexities upon the broad shoulders that seemed only to square themselves to meet new emergencies. Perhaps, she thought for a swift second, he could even help her to bear the tragedy which threatened himself. Perhaps this experienced strength and courage might know of some way of dealing with a boy like Dick gone mad all at once with lust of living, and a girl like Trix trembling upon the threshold of a great change!

Might she have spoken? Who knows? In her excitement and exaltation she was so near to it as literally to start back at a knock on the door, and to clasp her hands in mute self-congratulation at the interruption. Archibald Johns, whose eyes leaped to her upon his entrance, thought she looked like a creature that might take wing, so alert, so charged she seemed with vital, imminent expression, and yet so determinedly dumb. But Johns was given to fanciful readings of this one face in which his world had come to be mirrored; and even as he kept his eyes upon it, while explaining to Michael the action of a caucus the night before, he saw it lose that strained intentness and grow warm with sympathy and hope.

He had begun to speak with reserve, with a caution that seeks, if possible, to anticipate and prevent a refusal; as one

does who, fearing the effect of a first unfavourable impression, begs involuntarily in voice, in phrasing and gesture, for time. But there was something so encouraging in the animated face from which he could not keep his eyes, so triumphantly assenting, that it influenced him.

"In short," he concluded abruptly, "we want you, Thwaites, to head the ticket, to give us your name to put up before the convention. There's a fine chance for an inglorious defeat, but there's a possibility of election in the fall. Will you make a personal sacrifice and on that slender possibility neglect your profession, submit to wreckage socially, and make of yourself a target for every conservative and every coward and weakling and scoundrel to throw mud at?"

Johns said sardonically to himself that this was not what he had intended to say; it was not the most alluringly persuasive argument, he admitted, and yet he knew by the shining of Therese Thorley's eyes what his friend's answer was to be.

"I can't neglect my profession, Johns," he said slowly, "for I have n't any — my eyes have robbed me of it. But the chance of something to do with my life comes as a breath-taking, miraculous tempering of the wind — like an after-thought of mercy from the Judge who has sentenced one for life to barren leisure; it — it almost hurts."

CHAPTER XV

AND what will you do, Trixy, when some day you will want something you cannot have?" It was old Peter Thorley's voice putting the question to her again after the lapse of years.

"I 'll take it!" she had cried on that day long ago when her grandfather catechized her. It was not the catechism of authority; young as she was at the time she knew that; it had never been a vehicle for admonition or reproof, and so the child had always met it frankly.

"But suppose it 's out of your reach — the thing you want, what then?" the old voice persisted.

"I 'll — I 'll climb."

"And if even then you cannot get it?"

She was silent. "I fink I 'll forget all about it," she said at last.

"Suppose you can't forget? Will you do without it?"

"I 'll coax someone to get it for me."

"And if there 's no one in the world who will get it for you?"

She looked up at him baffled and longing, so vividly her childish imagination desired the unknown thing she must covet and never possess. It was then; she remembered, that Judge Thorley's old friend interfered.

"Your grandfather is a conscienceless experimenter, baby," he had said soothingly, and the tone comforted though the words were incomprehensible, "who thinks he 's a scientist,

only a teasing, bad old boy. . . . People, when grow up, Trixy, don't keep on wanting things they can't . They get them or they do without them. Don't worry, little girl."

She recalled how consolingly the voice of Dick's father had shed that terrible strain of futile wanting. But she shed as well the quick distrust that followed as he added, "Most of us can get what's good for us; when we can't, usually best that we can't."

"Is jam bad for us?" she had asked suspiciously.

"Sometimes — yes. That's why they keep it on top shelves where you can't get at it without breaking s."

He slid from his knee. "I'd bweak all the bottles on the shelves to get at the one on the top."

"Not when you're grown up, Beatrix," he said reprovingly. "When you're a big lady you'll never dream of spoiling s."

She still remembered how she had looked at him then, ting, wondering, discrediting; speculating upon what of big lady she should be if she were different from her self, and detesting finally, as she would an impostor, big lady who by a trick of years should grow out of and the place of the Trix that was, stealing all reality from

that night of the pantomime and all the next day two spent in battling, the undisciplined Beatrix and big lady of old Matthewson's prediction. Pitifully alike were, after all, the lofty detachment of the one who did not spoil things, if that were the only way of getting s, being still as far from her comprehension as in the

days when the two men sat and smoked and theorized in the old Judge's quiet room at Thorley.

But she did not want to spoil things, Trix cried to herself over and over in the hours she spent alone, locked in her room on the plea of indisposition. She only wanted what she wanted. And that? Oh, the sight of Dick Mathewson's virile beauty, the clasp of his hand, the light in blue eyes that seemed to kindle and blaze from a spark in her own, the voice that had a happy catch in it of boyish eagerness that made her smile with tenderness, as she recalled it, even while she wept; the magic of these past weeks that had transfigured every word of his or hers, that had made the days a mad and merry playtime as in her childhood, but with such sweetness added, such heart-thrilling delight as made her realize she had never known what life had to give till now.

He seemed so keenly hers, this handsome boy; no, he seemed her very self made masculine, with his audacious young light-heartedness, with his readiness to live and find life joyous, his radiant susceptibility to beauty and gaiety and the sensuous pulse of living, and his brave and laughing disregard of all that would shadow pleasure, now that he had thrown aside the anchorite's cowl that had masked and chilled his youth, and kept her from him.

Oh, if he had but unmasked sooner! If he could but have seen in her the mirror of the self he denied and repressed and prisoned! When she thought how it might have been between them, it was as in a world-dance she saw herself and him, in a tempestuously happy flight, a gladness and gaiety of motion for which no image in modern life was adequate; only the old, old friezes she had been studying in her incarnation of nymph-hood seemed to possess that

of bodily happiness which informed every line of the face called up before her.

On the reverse of this shining vision she was literally incapable of contemplating; her mind turned from it as automatically the night before, she had turned from her husband without effort, to shut herself in with her thoughts. She had not been consciously antagonized by his presence; she did not resent him. In the bright and blinding sun that had risen for her, his candle's light was dimmed to extinction. Her innate sense of fulfilment left no room in her soul for remorse, for introspection; she did not indict or defend or excuse. She only longed for the lover who lived for her as she had last seen him, his manly young body gracing the resplendent garments of masquerade, forgetful of self and all the world as he gazed on her, his rapturous eyes a mirror, and, having once looked into, she might never again see herself lacking that radiance of the Adored One, with which his passion had haloed her.

But she could but see him — if she could but see him! At every knock at her door, each time the maid presented her, her heart to knocking, too, whipped the blood to her cheeks and sent her hand clutching hysterically at her throat. The girl asked if it was there her mistress suffered.

But Beatrice knew no message could come from him. With the quickening of love's passion she comprehended him more by far than she did the man by whose side she had lived years, for her every faculty seemed set on knowing her thoughts and the labour of creating within herself his mind, his feelings, his tastes, was a work of exquisite satisfaction.

— no word could come from him to her. He was gone from her as completely as though he had been swallowed up forever by that black darkness that succeeded the light in

which he had beheld her last night and been revealed to himself. She knew, she knew for a certainty that the vision she had had of a multiplied capacity for living, united with the one she loved, was a thing that had existed for just the second they two looked into each other's awakened eyes. Now, there was nothing for him to say to her, nothing.

But it might be, it must be (the thought came suddenly) that he had spoken to Tessy. She tried to telephone her, but at the Settlement Anne Gregory said she was resting after a hard day's work; she hoped Tess was asleep, she added, for her fever of the night before had increased and she might be in for a serious illness. At another time that threat of illness would have awakened all Trix's solicitude, but now she was fevered herself and wretched, shut in egotistically by her own suffering; she left a message asking Tessy to come to her when she waked, and then she buried her head in her pillows and wept with torturing, unreconciled bitterness.

But suddenly, when it became dark, panic terror came upon her. She was never even to see him again; that was the meaning of his silence. With love's divination she realized the step he was to take and, springing from her couch, she summoned her maid to dress her.

Feverishly, as the girl set about her task — in which her mistress was wont to share as joint priestess in a rite before the pretty idol both decked — Beatrix sat looking into the mirror, seeing nothing there but hot, rebellious eyes that blazed defiance and lips that trembled with apprehension lest it might already be too late. To Beatrix love had come at last and vanity stole shamed away

When she came upon Michael in the hall she was as startled as though it had been a stranger, so far he was from her thoughts, so full and turbulent were those thoughts that

ed within her. She answered his query as to her destination, with the light evasion with which she had grown accustomed to forestall criticism; but he repeated the words though suddenly determined to probe what lay behind.

Out?" he said slowly. "Of course you're intending to go out if you leave the house at all. But to say 'out' when I ask where you are going is hardly an answer."

She looked at him a moment; in her impatience she saw nothing in this new demand but detention when she could not bear it. "You've accepted it, though, many times," she said coldly.

He nodded. "Yes, but — I can't any more."

Why not?"

"Because ——" The word shot from him, but an afterthought modified the tone of what followed. "It's rather long story, Trix. Come in and sit down and listen."

"I have n't much time," she murmured, but followed willingly into the smoking-room.

He stopped to look at her as she dropped into a great acco-coloured easy-chair and, with her elbows on her knees and her chin in her palms, stared straight before her. A lamplight shone upon the young grace of her pose, upon her little light body brave in silks, and her delicately poised head wreathed in pale gold and flower decked. She was fine from the slender arch of eyebrow to slippered foot; she would have been a temptation to an etcher's needle as she sat there, but something more than sharpness of outline had come from Michael's eyes. He looked and saw only a puzzling, baffling child with a temperament which balked his strenuous efforts at comprehension; a child, but a woman, the daughter of whose determined will he had hitherto avoided coming from pity and fear and magnanimous distaste.

He knew how far apart they were, yet he began to speak with an assumption of her interest in the things which they must still have in common. In detail, which is the obverse of the reserve of reticent men, he dwelt upon the treatment he had taken at the Island, the hopes he had buried, the struggles he had passed through, the limitation to which, in the future, he must submit.

And she, though she stared shrinkingly at him, as at one upon whom has fallen some uncanny blight, crippling and deadening, was listening only to a whirring in her brain which whispered that the thing she craved was already denied her; that tortured her by suggesting her lover's absence from the meeting the little coterie had agreed upon to follow the tableaux; that tempted her to turn and fly, her fingers in her ears that she might hear nothing but her own insistent terrors and master them; that she might find out; that she could end the alternating misery and throbbing hope that choked her; that she should know — that she should know!

Almost involuntarily she rose, lifted from her chair by the force of the emotion that possessed her. "I'm sorry," she stammered, seeking for words and dully missing them, despite her manifest effort. "It — perhaps it may not be so bad, after all, as you think. I — we can talk it over some other time."

He looked quickly toward her, and the very incredulosity in his face caught her attention. "Don't think," she added, struggling against her preoccupation, "that I don't realize —"

"Sit down. I have n't finished." The interruption was quiet and without haste, and her body yielded though her mind was hesitant and rebellious. "I've told you all this," he went on, content now to leave so intimately personal a

theme, "only to explain what I have done. I am going to accept the nomination for mayor which the Third Party will offer me. I'm going to devote myself to that from now on and — and this fact must have a considerable influence on the way we order our lives hereafter, you and I."

She clasped her hands tightly. How long, how long should she be able to sit there and listen? There would be days and years and years, dull, empty, dreary long years to listen, when the sun had gone out and the world was blackly cold and dreary, when romance would be dead and love a memory and pleasure ashes, and life one long waiting for a thing destined never to come; when she could close her eyes, for there 'd be nothing to see, and relieve her strained senses that tugged at her now as though the passionate tide on which they rocked would bear them away. Oh, then she would listen; she would listen forevermore, as patiently as he liked, if only — if only . . .

She was on her feet again, her wrap caught about her, while with confused murmured phrases she hurried from him. But when she reached the door, he was standing there facing her. "Where are you going to-night, Trix?" he demanded, and the deliberate distinctness of the question brought the answer from her which it seemed to her now, panting with anger and cold with dislike, she did not care longer to conceal.

"To meet Daisy and Count Max and the others at a supper given for those who took part last night," she answered.

"I wish — I wish you would not go," he said; it was a statement, as he voiced it, not an appeal.

She shrugged her shoulders wearily. Of course. He always wished her not to go.

"I particularly object to my wife's being seen in company with Curtis Varney's niece," he added.

Her glance met his for an instant; they were standing close to each other and even to Michael's short-ranged eyes the contemptuous disbelief in her face was apparent. "That's something entirely new," she commented.

"Yes," he admitted, "new as the position in which I find myself as the recognized leader of men pledged to put Varney in jail. My name has already been given out."

"I can't drop an old friend for a thing like that," she said, with the air of brushing aside an irrelevancy. "You and Mr. Johns will never succeed in putting Mr. Varney in jail—never in the world. You only make yourselves ridiculous," she added with conviction.

The positiveness of her judgment appalled him, stung him, too, for he cried threateningly, "Look here, Trix, I'll permit nothing to stand in the way now. My—my knife broke in my hand and left me weaponless. Johns has given me this new one and with it another, a rare, second, precious chance at action. I swear to you no nonsense of yours shall wreck me or handicap me. You're not going to be seen in company with the people I'm fighting. You're not to make a spectacle of yourself as you did last night. You've got to consider the effect of what you do on what I want to do. You're not going to this supper to-night—you'll have to give it up. I'm determined about it." He left the door as he spoke and, sitting down, filled his pipe and lit it.

She stood by the door looking over at him. His back was turned to her, but so limited had his eyesight become he could not have read her face, if he had tried. But he felt the silence that followed, and in that silence came a shocked sense of relief at being openly at war. He did not smoke the

lighted pipe he held. He sat looking back into the years of his married life, upon times of compromise that satisfied neither; times of fitting and trimming and shaping and struggling that rent the garment of their union, never wholly patched; times of looking forward beyond the hopeless present to a future that must be worse since it could not be bettered; many, many times of fighting off this very hour. And behold, it was here in all its tragic soul-shabbiness, its hackneyed motif of humanity's unworthiness, its knell of failure. . . . As he had known in his heart it would surely be.

"And all" — her voice startled him, it was so clear and cold and contemptuously unangered — "because of your absurd jealousy of Count Thuri! Oh, if you only knew —"

"No." The negative checked the mad, defiant confession on her lips. "No, I 'm jealous of no one." He turned, but he did not move toward her. "I can't be — any more."

She nodded. It was an acquiescence more significant than words, an acknowledgment of divorce that hurt even him by its acceptance. "I 'll not go to the Count's supper to-night," she said and, swiftly opening and closing the door, was gone.

Slowly, Beatrix was taking off her evening gown. She was not aware of having come up the stairs, for the sudden crystallization of purpose wrought by Michael's words left no interval of time in her consciousness between that moment she had stood facing him and the next one in which she stood in her own room.

What brought back self-consciousness was the sight of Tessy lying on the couch, where she had fallen asleep and

been roused by the rustle of Trix's skirts. She sat up now half dazed.

"Home from the supper already, Trix?" she questioned drowsily, so bewildered by the suddenness of her waking and the throbbing in her head that she did not realize how short a time she had slept.

Beatrix nodded. She did not answer, she could not speak. It was easier, safer to acquiesce; it seemed to her her voice must betray her, so strong was the sense of change that possessed her. It was because she could not trust herself that she had refrained from summoning her maid; she forgot that she had given the girl permission to go out. Silently turning her back to Tessy, she knelt down before her that she might unfasten her dress, and mechanically Tessy helped her. As she did so, her hot dry hands came in contact with Trix's neck, and the scorch of the fever in them penetrated even that passionate abstraction in which all her world had been engulfed.

"You — you 're not going to be ill, Tess?" she asked, turning quickly.

Impatiently Tess shook her head. She was at that irritated incipient stage of physical suffering when denial seems almost sovereign, and denial of what might cause Trix anxiety was instinctive in her. She did not speak until the last hook was unfastened.

Then Trix rose and lifted the shining robe over her head. When she emerged, face and throat and breast were aglow with colour, for Tessy had spoken Dick's name.

Oh, to hear that name! To hear a voice lift into sound and reality the dumb syllable that had been pulsing within her, singing at her lips all this long night and day, like a thing demanding vocal life. For the moment, she heard no more

than just this; and this was miracle enough. Then the wave of hot emotion receded and she could listen to what followed.

"I came — I wanted to spare you, Trixy, the shock of not finding him there," Tessy was saying slowly; words were difficult to her, for the beating at her temples and the cutting pain in her throat.

"At the supper?" Trix asked quickly.

Tess nodded. "But you had already gone," she added with a sigh, lying back upon the pillows, "and I fell asleep, I'm so tired. And now — of course — you know all about it, my poor Trixy," she said, and wearily closed her eyes. There was more, much more, that must be said between her and Trix, but the strain of the past twenty-four hours and the illness, which she had been holding at bay, overpowered her; she would postpone, she said to herself, to-night she could do no more.

A silence fell between them; the exhaustion and stupefying languor of fever upon Tessy, but upon Trix that terrible silence in which sensation mounts to white heat and words cannot come for the bubbling lava of passion that chokes and rends. And so both were still, Tessy prone in her weakness and Trix tense with the strength of the emotion tearing at her. She could only wring her nerveless hands, twisting them till pain came to her relief; then, though her voice was hoarse and low, she spoke. "What did he tell you, Tess?" she asked.

Tessy sat up, a hand to her head. It was hot, but she was shivering with cold. "Nothing more," she said with an effort, "than that he was going, that's all."

"And no message — none, for me?"

"Trix!" Tessy cried, rising to confront her.

But the reproachful sisterly voice could not follow into the

bad lands where sinners press on, their bleeding feet blistered by the arid heat of passion, their eyes straining toward the rapture and the glory of love's mirage. "Where?" she demanded. "Where 's he going?"

Tessy shook her head.

"Where?" repeated Trix, and the low cry was so imperative it brought its answer.

"To Boston on the ten-forty-five. He sails — he ——"

"Yes!" She caught Tess's arm and held it.

"Gone already," mumbled Tessy.

Trix's eyes flew to the little brass clock that ticked on her dresser. Half-past nine it marked. More than an hour! She had more than an hour! Tessy's eyes dreamily followed hers, but with the mounting of her fever, sensation had become blurred; she shook her head irritably, as though denying her treacherous senses and fighting dully against the false impression. Then, confused, she made a step forward to assure herself, but a warm weakness came over her and she fell in a heap on the floor.

In thinking it over long after, it seemed to Tessy that she could not wholly have lost consciousness; or rather, that every few moments she was awake and aware of Trix's soft hands caring for her; of hearing her telephone for the doctor and a nurse and trying vainly to protest; of being safe in Trix's own bed where she might yield at last to the malady she had fought for days, and be comforted; and finally of that beloved voice murmuring caressingly, appealingly, though the words were drowned in a thick fog that she struggled to pierce, that she was always just about to dissipate, and yet at last was drowned in.

In the time to come, in one of those terrible interregnums when one stands apart from his life and views it with dry,

disillusioned eyes, the sense of that hurried, anguished beseeching became clear to Tessy, and in her heart she knew and with all her soul she granted the prayer her stricken ears had been deaf to.

Yet on that night when she waked to consciousness before sleep finally overtook her, she was unaware of all that had gone before, unaware that her drowsy, but sane question, "Why don't you come to bed, Trix?" was the signal that set Beatrix Thwaites free.

Below in the smoking room, where he kept vigil over the love dead and gone from him, Michael heard the front door close. A moment before, he thought he had caught in the mirror opposite, which reflected the stairway, a glimpse of a hurrying little figure in the trained nurse's blue, bonneted and cloaked; but distrustful of his eyes, he decided it was one of the maids. Now he started from his chair and followed to the door. "Tess!" he called, looking out into the street, but she had already reached the corner and was running now with a light grace and speed that took his mind, with a pang, back through the years to Thorley, where a creature named Trix, half-child, half-elf, was used to outrun even the boys on the place.

CHAPTER XVI

IT MUST have been after midnight when Tessy woke. This she knew, for the little clock on the dresser chimed one almost immediately. There was a brassy constriction in her throat and her pulse was racing; mechanically she put her fingers to her wrist, but each time, as she began the counting, her mind seemed to float away with a curious, gossamer-like insubstantiality.

Presently, to her relief, cooler fingers set themselves upon that irregularly bounding pulse and, though she herself wavered between consciousness and insensibility — lifted almost imperceptibly out of the sea of being or lowered most gently into it, as upon a softly, inexorably receding wave — she knew those steady fingers never wavered and, obscurely satisfied that some capable one was attending the patient (whoever it might be) she fell asleep again.

That it hurt the patient terribly to swallow was the thought that marked her return to sensibility; yet though capable of this reflection Tessy was not aware that it was she who drank from a cup the nurse held to her lips. Identification of herself with that impersonal responsibility, the patient, came only with the doctor's call in the early morning; the stab of the needle brought mind-clearing pain and she knew that the battling, saving toxin had been injected.

"It is — it is —" She frowned; the word was too long, why did n't the nurse supply it? "Is n't it?" she demanded sharply.

"Yes. Let's hope it will be a light case," answered the nurse.

But experience told Tessy how baseless was that hope. She turned sharply and saw Trix's empty place beside her. "Where is she?" she asked.

"Asleep," answered the nurse readily, laying a quieting hand upon her. "She got tired and went to bed in another room."

Tessy nodded. "Better not have her come in," she murmured. "She might take it, poor — poor — poor ——"

A sudden paroxysm of weeping shook her. Life had become very vague, feverishly indistinct, and she was aware that consciousness was fleeting, but in all the intangible nightmare of developing disease, the reality of Trix's suffering never waned; that and her own powerlessness to help seemed to accompany the sufferer, whether she looked out sanely upon the world, or from eyes fever-bright with delusion.

It was this phase of her illness, she discovered, that seemed to trouble some one who stood at the door and conversed with the doctor once, at some unplaceable moment in an unnamable day or night; for the hours had lost themselves. But she distinctly heard the little dialogue and knitted her brows, trying vainly to comprehend.

"It's only a form of self-pity, I'm sure," the doctor said. "Many hysterical women show it, of course you know, particularly in delirium."

"But she is n't hysterical," protested the deeper voice.

There was something in the timbre of that voice that called to Tessy. "Michael," she said, a wavering smile on her trembling lips.

He came in then quickly, and bent over her. "What is it?" he asked.

She looked up beseechingly and he, looking into her imploring eyes, bent closer repeating more gently, "What is it, dear?"

At that she broke again into bitter weeping. "Oh, be kind to her," she sobbed. "Be good to her — be patient. You don't — you don't know how ——"

"There! There!" he said patting her shoulder. "Just get well and it will be all right again."

She pondered that last sentence after he was gone; took it to her as a charm to bridge over gaps in consciousness and pain-racked wakings, for it was the only promise she credited, the only hope that seemed real. And she meant to act upon it, yet each time she heard his voice she called his name and, bursting into tears, begged him over again to be forbearing and magnanimous.

But after a time, it seemed to her, he did not come any more, and she thought he wearied of her prayers; so that she fell silent and lay brooding for hours, speaking only when compelled, yet surprising her nurse, Miss Winchell, often by a quick, furtive question: "She is well? She — seems happy — Mrs. Thwaites?" To which the answer was always in the affirmative, with an added business-like "She sends you her love, and says you must get well quickly."

But she could not get well. In her weakness, Tessy cried to herself it was too hard to get well. She did not know herself in the shaken woman she had become, so quick to weep. Despondency seemed to drag her down, and though delirium finally passed, it still appeared to her as though its dark and heavy wings shadowed her, so curiously incomprehensible was something in the bearing of nurses and physicians, something intangible that subtly disquieted her and all the more because she could not define it. It never

showed in Miss Winchell's voice, cheery, practical, matter-of-fact, nor in the doctor's suavely optimistic air. But it was there, and one day she thought she almost put her finger upon it, incredible as it seemed.

"How long have I been sick?" she asked. She had been fretting for Beatrix and wondering how long their separation must last.

"Not long," responded Miss Winchell lightly evasive. "It always seems long, does n't it — longer than it is. I know how you feel."

Feebly Tessy shook her head; she could not cope with that prompt and cheery side-tracking. "How long before there will be no danger of contagion?" she said putting her question in another form.

"Oh, some weeks yet," said her nurse gently. "Anyway, you know you're not strong enough to see people."

"Yes, but — but —" The ready tears brimmed in her eyes and ran over; she brushed them angrily away. "She might — she could — she could write me a word."

"Why!" exclaimed the nurse, and then quickly moderating her tone, she added, "So she could — so she could. But you have n't been well enough to read letters, you know."

"Just my name — in her writing," said Tessy hungrily.

"Yes, yes, of course," agreed Miss Winchell.

Tessy looked up at her, perplexed at something, she knew not what. The nurse caught her glance and resumed quickly, "The thing for you to do is to get well; then everything will be just as you want it. Come — try to eat. What can I prepare for you? I've tried everything."

Tessy shook her head.

"I wish you would try to think of something you'd like,"

urged the nurse. "It would be such a feather in my cap if I could coax you to take something. Please!"

A smile of faint whimsicality parted Tessy's lips; she knew the formulæ so well, she had tried them all over and over again. "Well," she said, "Josephine makes a sort of sherbet, a drink. Perhaps I could drink some of that, a little."

"Good! Now who and where is Josephine? The cook's name 's Molly, is n't it?"

Tessy nodded. "I'm speaking of the French maid, my sister's maid."

"Oh," exclaimed Miss Winchell blankly. "I'm so sorry."

Tessy turned to regard her with mute questioning; she was still so weak that talking was an effort.

"The French maid," said Miss Winchell humorously, "like all densely ignorant women, took no chances. She fled the moment she heard your illness was contagious; would n't even enter the house."

Tessy nodded understandingly. "That 's like Josephine," she whispered.

The nurse regarded her keenly for a moment. "If you knew her address I could go and find out from her how to brew that famous sherbet," she suggested.

Tessy shook her head apathetically.

"Don't you know it?" urged Miss Winchell, regretful of her patient's relapse into indifference.

Again Tessy shook her head.

"Oh, I know!" Miss Winchell exclaimed, rising and going to the dresser. "She left a note for you; perhaps she gives it in there." And returning, she placed an envelope in her patient's listless hand.

Tessy lifted it, looked at the address and dropped it upon the pillow. "It's not for me," she said wearily, "for my sister."

Miss Winchell's quick eyes fell; she took the letter and replaced it in the drawer. "To be sure," she said heartily; "how absurd of me!"

Tessy's lip curled. Was she really as dull as that, or —? And then the shock of suspicion came full upon her. Amazement lent her a fictitious strength to test the verity of her impression. "Wait a moment," she said with an effort. "Perhaps, after all, it is — for me. Look again. If — it is, give it to me." And she held out a shaking hand.

With quick adaptability, the nurse scanned the address again and, smiling, placed the envelope in Tessy's hand. But the smile left her lips, for her patient's accusing eyes caught hers and held them, and in that second the perplexed woman knew she had made a mistake. Skilfully she tried to remedy it, but Tessy turned silently from her and closed her eyes.

She could not close her mind, though; over and over, as she lay there, Tessy strove to put a question clearly to herself and to answer it. But her body was pitifully feeble, and the nervous strain of the days when she had already been ill and refused to yield to illness was telling upon her now. Anxiety for Trix clutched her cruelly; yet crueler was her own feeling of neglect, her longing for one word in the familiar handwriting. Yet, through it all, recurred insistently the question whose answer eluded her fantastically; her heart thundered within her, and her head throbbed, till presently she felt the nurse's touch and yielded to it and the merciful soothing of the opiate she administered.

Because of the danger to her heart, they would keep her dulled with sedatives; she knew that and recognized the wis-

dom of it, even while she longed for mastery over her brain to solve the riddle that puzzled her, to find out what was being kept from her. So she lay placid for long hours, abandoning herself to the skill that worked for her, deferring thought, so far as she was able, for she was resolved that with thought should come action, and with all her soul she willed and fought for strength.

The result was a betterment that surprised herself and relieved the nurse from the necessity of close attention. And it was this relaxing in the sick-room régime, for which Tess waited. It took the shape of a short nap in the afternoon, a half-hour's withdrawal to the couch in the curtained alcove, that Miss Winchell permitted herself as her charge convalesced, at the time when all probable wants had been anticipated and the patient, too, often slept.

During the passing of monotonous days that made this programme habitual, Tessy deliberated and decided; yet when the afternoon which she had chosen came, she was still so helpless that the mere thought of carrying out her plan set her heart to beating and filled her with tremulous apprehension, formless but fearful. The necessity for caution, too, further excited her. She was resolved not to fail, and yet the short distance between the bed where she had so long lain, and the room they had said Trix occupied, stretched before her, a distance almost impassable. Her weakness cried out protesting to her, and the feeble, idle hands that had forgotten even self-service, through weeks of disuse, trembled pitifully as she caught up a robe and, her knees swaying under her, slipped stealthily toward the door.

There could be no danger to Trix, none, she kept childishly repeating, from contagion; that excuse had been abandoned long ago. And yet daily her nurse had smilingly told her

Trixy was in the blue room almost within sound of her voice, whence she sent pretty, silly, empty, un-Trixy-like messages and never, never came.

She knew the truth, even as she stood wavering on the threshold of the pretty little apartment. Trixy had never occupied it; it spoke of anything but her; it was a vacant, uninhabited four walls with bed and chairs and table arranged in that expectant orderliness that is so different from a humanized habitation — and, above all, from the place Trix vivified. No perfume freshly delicate and fragrant; no trifles of flowers and ribbon and lace thrown heedlessly over a chair; no little slipper peeping from under cover; no — no trace of that gay, lavish presence; nothing but her tiny sleeve-dog curled up at the foot of the couch, neglected, suffering. Tess put out a shaking hand to pat it, but the little creature, after a quick start, snapped at her and laid itself down again.

A cold horror came over her; she shivered and her hands and feet were numb, but her galloping heart beat beneath her hands till its motion shook her and she caught hold of the table to steady herself. Then she saw a heap of unopened letters with Trix's name upon them. Mechanically she fingered them; they seemed the letters of someone who would never claim them, of someone dead. She began tremblingly to long for bed, a sense of such utter animal weakness came over her. Then her eyes fell upon an envelope addressed in Anne Gregory's handwriting and she took it up and tore it open. It must have contained a few words to accompany its enclosure, but Tessy never knew what those words were, for she held in her shaking hand a letter — not to, but from Beatrix, and to herself.

She put it to her bosom and held it like a talisman over the

tumult of her heart; she lifted it to her cheek, caressing it as though it were a living thing; she murmured broken, loving words to it. She could hardly bear to tear it open, so warm it seemed with exquisite sentience, so dear, so vitally dear.

"TEXSY DARLING: I've gone with Dick — this goes back to you with the pilot. I had to go — I had to; that's all about it. You must understand that, and not grieve.

"As for Michael — he does n't care; it was all over with both of us long ago. Don't waste any sympathy on him: he's hard and strong, awfully, stonily strong. He won't suffer, and he'll never forgive, and I don't care. But you — you must n't worry, darling. It should make you glad to know how happy, happy I am; how I could sing, sing this letter to you, I'm so gloriously happy! Don't you spoil that happiness by being wretched about me, my Tessy. Please, please don't! If you do, I shall feel it (as we used to each other's mumps and measles when we were tots) and all the love of my boy will not make up to me for it.

"And I shall have to be happy for two, sometimes. Not always — no, no. But he says such frightful things of himself, my Dick, and I just have to love him away from his misery. That is my punishment, dearie, that feeling of shame and treachery I've brought him for dowry. But I've brought him more than this, so much more that the poison of it will die out in time and leave him the joyous, beautiful boy that he was meant to be, that he is most of the time, that he must be always.

"Till then, I must think only of him. And till he's cured, I've sworn to myself to let no memory of anything or anyone — not even you, darling — come to hurt him. So I'm going as far off with him as he wants to go, out of the way of people and everything that could remind him. You see, I can't give you any address, for I'm simply going with Dick. And he is flying just now from himself. He does n't know where he'll find forgetfulness, full-handed happiness. Neither do I, but I know we will

find it, for I've got it in me to give to him, and he shall have it, I swear he shall!

"So you can't write to me (for a while, any way) and I may not write to you, Tetsy; but my address will be just *Where My Love Is* — which is the home of happiness and me, believe me.

"TRIX."

There was a postscript:

"You did get well. You are well. I'm sure you are. Some day, my Tess, some happy, happy day, even if it is far off, we'll be together again. I don't know how, but we will. T."

She had had strength to read to the end; if it had been ten times as long she could still have stood and read Trixy's words. But with the last line, though it promised reunion, came a feeling that it might indeed be the last word for years, perhaps forever, between them. She was too shaken to bear that thought; the world seemed crumbling beneath her, and with a cry, she fell. But even as her senses wavered, she crushed the letter in her hand and held it tight.

It was there, crumpled into a hard ball in her clenched fist, when she waked to consciousness and found herself back in bed. Her first thought was for this precious letter; indeed, so identical were the mental processes, that it seemed to her but a continuation of desire she experienced to hold this thing fast and safe in the very ghastliness of her swoon. She was so gratified at having kept it that she smiled up into Miss Winchell's troubled face reassuringly. "I'm all right," she said steadily.

"How could you!" exclaimed the nurse reproachfully.

Tetsy looked up at her anxious face; for the first time she felt a sympathetic share in all this woman must have borne in trying to keep the truth from her. "It was best," she said slowly. "I know now, and ——" An hysterical

sob caught her throat, but she waited, mastered it, and continued calmly, "The truth is bad, but not so bad as what I began to fear."

The lines faded from Miss Winchell's face; she had never heard her patient's voice so calm and reasonable. "If only there are no bad effects," she murmured.

Tessy shook her head confidently. "I will lie quiet, really quiet, now," she said. "I will be very careful, and to-morrow morning you will see how well I am, and you will ask Doctor Thwaites to come to me."

"Then no more talking now," cautioned the nurse.

Her patient smiled acquiescence. She did not want to talk. What was there to talk about? Could she talk of Trix and Dick to a stranger? Could she talk of her to anyone? Could she make clear to anyone in the world the exquisite lulling comfort it was to have this paper in her hand that Trix had touched, and to read the words she had traced, after that joy fear that had held her for a moment in the empty room across the hall. Oh, yes, her best-beloved was a sinful, love-mad girl, but she was hers, and she was alive; alive with that passionate fulness of living that happiness meant to Trix; with which it almost seemed she re-dowered the world that gave it her, so brave and bright was her reflection of it! Oh, the world is warm, Tessy cried to herself as she lay quiet with closed eyes — warm and still sweet and desirable, since somewhere in it lives Trix, a sun-fairy, to gladden and enjoy it!

For the rest — but there was nothing more; nothing at least to-day but peace after the tumult of terrible doubt, rest after long weeks of suffering. "Oh, God," prayed Tessy within herself before she fell asleep, "forgive my blessed Trixy and — make it right for her to be happy."

In the morning she remembered her prayer, but she could not repeat it. There was Michael to meet, the brother whose long cry had now that sleep had cleared her mind restored her balance — Michael, a generous and honourable man betrayed by his wife and his boyhood's friend. Ah, the pity and the shame of it!

That pity and shame fell full upon her as he came into the room where she waited for him, and her eyes filled; but she had determined to be strong, to leave behind the strange, hysterical Tessy of these past days, with her tears and her fears and her weakness. So she had insisted upon sitting up for the short interview, in the low chair before the grate, rapped in a loose gown in which her body nestled lovingly because it had been Beatrix's.

It strengthened her to see how composed, even commonplace, his manner was. If Trix was right, and he were not really hurt, began her thought — and for a moment the tragedy seemed to lift; but then came the after-thought of the terrible treachery revealed in her desertion, and Tessy's heart went out to him.

To Michael there was something curiously, pitifully brave in the little watchful figure whose big eyes regarded him with grave compassion. The nurse had reported to him her patient's improvement, and the very absence of the egotism which illness in her was evidence of this. But the composed calmness of her manner, so unlike her normal self, he commented silently, was an indication still of the unusual. "It is very good to see you out of bed again," he said, deciding quickly upon the commonplaces of the sick-room as the safest conversational bridge over which they two might cross to ordinary things. He took the hand she held out to him and contrasted it with the feverish fingers that

had sought in the early stages of her illness always to detain him.

"I have n't been very brave," she said slowly, as though she, too, were remembering, "nor very sensible — nor patient. I'm — sorry."

He looked up and she caught his expression of surprise. "Oh, I don't know," he assured her lightly. "It has been a severe attack. Now that you are getting on so well we can tell you how alarmed we have been."

Something that seemed to her determinedly cold and impersonal in his tone nettled her. "We?" she questioned.

"The doctor, the nurses and I."

"Oh!" she exclaimed and fell silent.

Professionally alarmed, she said to herself — that was all that he could feel for her now. How quickly the bond between them had fallen apart! Was it manlike to ignore the tight clutch of childhood's years, tight and tender as baby fingers; to loosen and disregard the clinging memories, just because a later, closer relationship had been disrupted — and through no more fault of hers than his own?

"We must speak, Michael," she said, with an attempt at formal dignity that reminded him oddly of old Peter Thorley's manner on occasions, "of — of — my sister."

She had been watching him when she began speaking. She was trying to sit erect and to keep her lips from trembling; but her eyes and her voice fell as she approached the dear name in her thought, and suddenly it seemed impossible to speak it to him — both for its own sake and his. So she chose the term that was unusual with her, but she said it proudly, with dignity.

He did not speak at once, and his silence was grateful to her for a time; then she looked up questioningly.

"I was thinking," he said reluctantly. "Must we speak of it so soon?"

"Yes."

"Can't it be postponed? You're really not well enough yet."

She shook her head impatiently.

"I — I'd like ——" he began, but broke off, and rising from his chair he continued, "Can't you trust me for a little longer to do everything you would want done?"

She looked up at him puzzled.

"You are getting on so well," he pleaded, as though with a child. "The doctors urge me not to let you excite yourself, and discussion of this must excite you. May I go now, and to-morrow or the next day ——" he concluded vaguely.

She stared at him more and more perplexed. Was he really unmoved as this? Could he, for her sake, so school himself as to affect such indifference? However slight the bond that had held him, did it cause him no more emotion than this, the breaking of it? And such a breaking! "I — don't think I understand you," she stammered.

"My dear," he said placidly, bending over her and speaking with the gentle definiteness one uses with a child that's lacking, "you have been very ill — not yourself, at all."

"I know," she admitted. "But it was her absence, I think, and the worry. I did not know I was such a coward, but it was so strange — that she never came, that — that you said nothing. I grew — fanciful. And you know I — I carried the worry of it before I fell sick, too — too long!"

"You did!" he exclaimed as though surprised out of his attitude of patient calmness. "You knew — before it happened?"

She nodded, clasping her hands eagerly and trying to speak.

"And did not advise the poor girl! Did not try to prevent it! Had your mind so full of folly, or worse, that you ——"

He stopped suddenly in his impetuous speech; the colour was coming and going in her thin face and her hands were caught over her heart.

"Never mind — never mind," he added with a quick resumption of his former manner. "All you can do now is to get well. Then you can help, you know." And with a light nod, he was ready to leave her.

"Oh, surely you know," she gasped, "I — I did n't know they would do that! I only knew they cared. I had been afraid they did, but — it did n't seem possible. I only found out for sure that night."

"What a pity, then, you could not have persuaded them to marry like ordinary lovers and spare us the scandal of this silly elopement," he said casually, turning at the door. "I've taken the liberty of publishing a marriage announcement anyway. If they don't thank me now for it, they will later."

She sat staring at the door he had closed behind him. Her heart had stopped its frantic beating; it seemed to her it had stopped all beating, so rigid still she felt, so chained there with stupefaction.

Miss Winchell, coming in brightly with the air of the nurse who has good results from a difficult case, found her there, and was pleased with the placidity of her pose. "We'll get you back to bed right away," she said cheerily. "You've done splendidly for the first time. I'll confess to you now I was n't in favour of this interview. But it's all right. You're in splendid trim. Now, to bed."

"In a minute," Tessy said slowly. "Let me have a hand-glass, please."

Smiling, the nurse produced one, and watched with pleased philosophy while her patient searched and searched within it. But that long, intent seeking disquieted Miss Winchell at length. "Now, don't get to worrying about a thin face and big eyes and clipped hair," she scolded genially. "It's only a matter of a few months and Doctor Thwaites will. . . . Good gracious!"

The interruption and exclamation were due to the crashing of the glass upon the tiles before the fireplace. The nurse fell on her knees and gathered up the fragments, but her patient, from whose hand it had dropped, did not change her tense attitude, nor did her eyes follow the glass to the floor.

"Come now, lady," said Miss Winchell, vaguely uneasy, as she lifted Tessa's arm about her own shoulders and helped her back to bed, "what's there to brown-study over? Are n't you sorry the pretty glass is broken?"

But her patient waved aside the broken mirror, and her searching, intent expression did not change.

"I suppose it can be mended," the nurse went on composedly, as she drew the covers up over the small, rigid body. "Comfortable?" she questioned, trying to hide her anxiety.

"Have I been out of my mind?" asked Tessa.

The nurse straightened up quickly. "Oh, dear, yes. Never had a bad 'dip' case that was n't; perhaps that's why it's called 'dippy,' for short," she exclaimed with a laugh, turning from those questioning eyes to pick up the robe she had dropped. "Some day, when you're a little stronger, I'll tell you all the funny things you fancied. But you've talked enough to-day — no more to-day, lady!"

"But you'd call me sane now?" Tessa persisted.

"Straight as I am!" Miss Winchell answered heartily.

"Doctor Thwaites said a moment ago there 's no doubt of it. now; but we must be careful, and the stronger you grow, of course ——"

"How can he be sure? He 's not a specialist."

"Oh, I don't know about that. Would n't you call him one in this particular case?"

Gravely Tessy's eyes questioned her.

"Why surely, in the case of his own wife, any doctor may be considered a specialist," Miss Winchell explained smiling.

Tessy's lids fell. ' I understand," she said.

CHAPTER XVII

THE smoking-room for the forward cars was deserted when Johns entered it. The private car of some plutocrat had been attached to the local train peculiarly, in such a manner as to divide it into two very uneven sections with no thoroughfare between. To Johns, who remarked upon the dearth of smokers on the train, the conductor explained the situation and added that it would be remedied at Thorley, where the special car was to be switched off and attached in its proper place at the end of a limited train southbound.

There was no apology in the conductor's manner as he vouchsafed the information, and Johns smiled grimly to himself at the plight of confirmed smokers like himself who, unlike himself, were so unfortunate as to be seated in the rear. When he sought, however, to elicit some expression of regret from the man in uniform, he was met with a candid, "Oh, they 'll have to grin and bear it. When Curtis Varney's niece gets married the rest of the world's got to expect some inconvenience."

Johns demurred; he hoped, he said, that the bride would be very happy, and declared her beautiful enough to grace the most palatial of private cars, but he failed to understand why people who had paid for the usual accommodations at the usual rate should be deprived of them on this account. To which the big conductor, looking up from the reports he was checking to glance at him over his spectacles, wondered

"why the deuce you've got any kick coming, seeing you're not hurt yourself. You must be an anarchist — something," he concluded, with the righteous indignation of the uniformed for such unreasonable folk who, comfortable themselves, take up the grievances of others. And gathering up his papers, as the train slowed down for just a moment at a small station, he left the smoking-room with another glance of disapproval at its sole occupant.

A second later, though, the door opened and another smoker entered. Johns looked up; accustomed to express most of what he felt, he welcomed the newcomer and opportunity of discussing the characteristic little incident. But a second glance at the carefully dressed gentleman's bristling short mustache and reddened face, which he recognized, made him realize the necessity of postponing such discussion. Instead, he nodded and opened the paper lying on his lap.

"Ah, 't is the great reformer, Mr. Johns!"

"Ah," parodied Johns, "'t is the happy bridegroom, Count Max Thuri! My congratulations. We every-day travellers hardly expected to get a glimpse of so gorgeous a vision as nobility on its honeymoon."

The young Austrian regarded him with shrewd, squinting eyes. "It was a mistake," he said dryly, "one of those providential mistakes which happen on honeymoons, noble and otherwise. I stepped out of the car at a station for a breath of air, and the train started. So I had to jump on anywhere."

"The conductor, who's flattered to death at having a special car on his train, would be delighted to restore you to your car," suggested Johns.

"Thanks," said the Count, offering his case as he seated himself and lighted a monogrammed, coronetted cigarette.

He smoked enjoyingly, with one cynical eye half closed and the other, through its monocle, fixed upon his companion, who was turning over the elaborately illustrated pages of his newspaper.

"What cads your newspapers make of themselves!" he said, leaning back lazily and regarding a photograph of himself that covered nearly the whole of a front page.

Johns nodded. "To suit the cads who love this sort of thing," he said. "What a pity, though, that some reporter could n't be in my position, shut up with the eagerly-sought-after bridegroom!" He took up another paper, seeking for news other than details of the wedding that to-day so monopolized the press's attention.

"She does put up a good front, does n't she?" remarked Count Max.

Johns looked up quickly; there was wrathful incredulity in the quick lift of his head. The Count waved his cigarette explanatorily toward an illustration in the paper in his companion's hand. "The Countess," he drawled. And then, as Johns did not speak, "Have n't I got the argot quite right?" he asked.

Johns looked from the full-length drawing of the bride in all her wedding finery, from the gracefully sumptuous figure and full-blown sweetness of the beautiful face to the appreciative gentleman beside him. "I think not," he answered coldly. "Americans don't use that expression in speaking of their wives."

Count Max laughed, a dry, little cackling laugh of enjoyment. "Oh, Countess Daisy would n't mind," he said lightly. "It'd flatter her to know I noticed her photograph. You have n't any idea, Mr. Johns, how many things an American girl learns when she becomes a countess."

Johns did not reply. He pulled his newspaper open and, finding on an inside page an account of the Third Party's convention and Michael Thwaites's nomination, he began to read.

The Count smoked silently; threw aside the end of his cigarette and began another, puffing luxuriously and inhaling the smoke with a long sigh of satisfaction.

"It's somewhere near here, I understand, that Mrs. Thwaites is living on her country place," he said presently.

Without lifting his eyes, Johns nodded.

"Perhaps you are on your way there," said the Count. "Lucky Mr. Johns! Positively, that little devilish-eyed girl is the only woman I ever met that had me out of my senses — mad for her!"

"That will be pleasing information for your wife," Johns could not refrain from remarking sententiously.

Count Max grinned. "As I told you — an American girl learns many things when she becomes a countess. Only Daisy knew before how that little witch —"

"Her husband," interrupted Johns, "is in the car ahead. Perhaps you'd like to confide in him."

Count Max indulged in a grimace. "No — oh, no," he said indifferently. "He wearies me. He must weary her, too, the little Lady Teazle. I suppose she lives in the country to escape him, while you and politics, fortunately, keep him in town. She looked too bored to live the last time I saw her, in the spring after her illness, driving in the park with her nurse; just a big-eyed shadow of the golden thing she was, a butterfly with its wings pulled off. What a bore he must be to have pulled her wings off, that tiresome Doctor Thwaites! She had so much spirit, I'd have sworn she would have been the victor, but —"

"Doctor Thwaites is my friend," said Johns distinctly. Count Max nodded lugubriously. "My condolences," he said briefly.

Johns could have laughed, the fellow was so consistently impervious.

"It would have been so charming," resumed the Count regretfully. "A woman like that, all fire, all wine, all light, champagne incarnate — and a husband whose eyesight is bad."

"An ideal combination!" sneered Johns.

"I wonder, after all," mused the Count undisturbed, "if it was the bore of a husband — for whom she did not care a rap, of course we know that. Perhaps it was something else that rubbed the gold from her wings — the loss of her lover that the sister ran off with. What do you think — eh?"

"I think," said Johns deliberately, "that you are the most contemptible bit of bestiality a decent man was ever compelled to listen to."

"Ah — h!" The Count regarded him thoughtfully for a moment, removing his cigarette from his full red lips and waving aside the smoke, the better to view Johns's face. "So! I remember you were hit hard yourself by the eloping Miss Thorley. . . . Who would have thought she was that sort, so much a sister to her sister, eh? Daisy does n't half believe in that tardy marriage announcement. Ha! ha! I'd like to meet her again. No one knows where the lovers are — eh?"

Johns threw his half-smoked cigar from him and rose.

Count Max rose, too, stretching himself languidly and looking out of the window at the landscape, rich with the weight of late summer's fulness. "We're getting near, eh, to Thorley and Mrs. Thwaites? Well," he shrugged philosophically, "it's strange, but that no longer gives me a

thrill. When I touched her hand that afternoon she drove in the park — she tried to avoid me — it was all gone. I told Daisy she could set the wedding for any day she chose. . . . Not a pulse-beat, and I used to be in a fever! Not a — a *frisson*, and once ——”

But Johns had fled, and was making his way wrathfully to the car ahead where Michael sat.

“I say, Johns,” Michael said, breathing in the scent of the tobacco his friend brought with him, “it’s cruelty to bad-eyed ex-smokers to let them get a whiff of that aroma. What were you smoking — not those heavy, black cigars of yours? There’s a lighter something, gentler, smoother ——”

Johns laughed. “It’s Count Maximilian Thuri’s cigarette smoke I’ve got mixed in. Bah! One feels the need of a bath to body and soul after being shut in with a small beast like that.” And he gave his friend a discreetly edited version of his meeting with the bridegroom.

“You must tell Mrs. Thwaites about it,” said Michael. “It will interest her. She used to be very fond of Mrs. Varney. I almost hoped she would want to come into town for the wedding, but her illness hangs on. I suppose it is that that makes her avoid people. I could not prevail upon her to come even to see me nominated.”

Johns’s eyes were sympathetic. If he could have had but one wish granted (since Fate had ordered that his own life should be forever solitary) he would have begged for happiness for this man who lacked it, who needed it, who would never do his best work, wanting it, and yet who had missed it, how his friend did not know. He never spoke of it, yet he showed it inevitably, in the close intercourse of their days together, to eyes clear with kindness.

“Perhaps,” he suggested with some diffidence, “you will

let me just stay for dinner and go back to town immediately after. I'm afraid of intruding upon Mrs. Thwaites. If she is n't well ——"

"Oh, I can't let you do that," protested Michael. "If you knew how it delighted me that she agreed to have you come! With a very few exceptions, you are the only person she has admitted. And — it is not good for her, it can't be for the sort of girl she was, to be so much alone."

"Of course, if I could rely upon your being frank with me ——" began his friend.

"There's no 'if' about it," Michael insisted. "Frankly, you were not a favourite of hers; frankly, it delights me to have her make an exception now in your case — but — you'll find her changed."

She was changed, Johns said to himself when she came forward to welcome him and congratulate them both upon the work of the convention which, after some debate, had made its choice for mayor unanimous. There was a new timidity about her, an air of waiting and watching, of being on guard, that he found strangely appealing. Despite the striking gown she wore, a frock significant even to his unobservant eyes, she looked a nun masquerading. And yet her alert little head, with its delicate profile and its fine, soft mass of short hair, parted boyishly, forbade the simile. There were contrasts about her that fascinated, a mysterious element that piqued and eluded, and tempted him to seek the solution in her face; but once or twice, as they were talking over the political situation and its chances, he caught a furtive glance from her that shamed him as though he had been trying to surprise a secret.

It was at a moment like this that she leaned forward

challengingly. "Say what you are thinking about me, Mr. Johns," she said.

Her voice was unchanged, and Johns smiled involuntarily to hear it; so young and gay it was with all the lilt in it that could set the blood to singing.

"I was wondering," he responded to the voice, evading the question, "why every woman does not cut her hair and become a charming boy; why such a coiffure should grace only a famous Pole's shoulders and your own."

She caught her breath; it seemed to him almost with a sigh of relief. The vigilant watchfulness left her, as though the relaxing tension of a tight-wound spring was felt in all its coil. She looked at him winningly, gratefully.

"But fancy poor Michael," she said lightly, "with a short-haired wife — Michael, whose ideal for women is that of Ser Agnolo Pandolfini, the old Florentine, who a few centuries ago sang with such sweet unselfishness of women's ways — as men would have them!"

"It is a trial," Michael said with his grim smile. "I have n't read him, though he's probably right. But your ways, when you are well and yourself, Trix, are anything but short-haired."

Her eyelids fell and she sat a moment in agitated silence. Johns marvelled at the quick change in her and strove to find some hidden significance in the words that seemed to hurt her, and a way to turn her mind from them. But before he could speak she recovered.

"But that was not really what you were thinking," she said gravely, returning to her original query.

"No," he agreed, "I was thinking that you have changed in these months that I have n't seen you."

"How?" she asked attentively.

"You are thinner, are n't you? And taller?"

"Perhaps."

"And younger and — older!"

She laughed. "Surely," she said.

"And — softer, and yet —"

"Harder? Yes, that too."

"Stronger is the word," he dissented quickly. "More serene and yet, in a way, less composed, wiser and — less experienced, but not so — evanescent . . . Oh, you see," he concluded smiling, "how contradictory is the change I'm trying to express. But, in short —"

"In short," Michael took the word from him, "Johns is trying to tell you that you no longer wear flowers in your hair." His dark face lighted up as he spoke, at the memory of a gay little straw head with cornflowers thrust carelessly in it, and he went on impulsively, "Remember how we agreed up in the crow's-nest 'board ship, where you vaudeville artists used to hold forth, that in each generation only one girl is born who can wear flowers in her hair, and that you were our one?"

He leaned forward as he spoke, and to Johns his big body seemed rarely eager, fluent; he had the odd impression of listening to more than the mere words. But the feeling was gone in an instant, dissipated by the unstudied indifference of her voice. "I have forgotten," she said, and Johns caught himself wishing much that she had not forgotten. "But what is one to do who has no hair to wear flowers in?" she added turning to him.

Yet she leaned forward and broke off a monstrous red carnation from those that decked the table and, tucking its stem into the amber comb that parted her shining hair, she faced him smiling. "Will that do?" she asked. There

was the half-confessed coquetry of beauty that knows and triumphs in itself, in the flushing little flower-like face she lifted. But in the same instant she put out both hands in a deprecatory gesture. "That 's enough about me," she cried. "Tell me some news, Mr. Johns, about other people."

So Johns related what he could of his encounter with Count Thuri on the train; his wrath mounted with the telling, expurgated though it was, as he looked into the pure little face opposite and mentally he cursed a defiling tongue and an imagination so corrupt as to blacken everything they touched upon. And yet he himself had but to look back to the evening when he had seen the two in all the gay intimacy of a tête-à-tête at the sumptuous Italian café, to recall his dissatisfaction in his friend's wife, to remember how he had marveled at the old misfit tragedy that had mated a man of brains and character with a volatile girl-beauty who dined alone with a Count Thuri.

It was that volatility, that high-spirited animation that seemed to become effervescent, which was missing now, he said to himself, as he glanced at her in an interval of the conversation; the gold-dust was indeed gone from her wings, as the Austrian had phrased it. But he had been mistaken in saying that she lacked them altogether, Johns decided; they were there — airy, fluttering, fanciful; but something, some new timidity or some unhappy experience, held them, sheathed, close pressed against each other as though their owner dared not risk their unused fragility in flight. Yet every now and then one caught the pretty flutter of the light, useless, charming things, as in the moment when she had set the scarlet of the carnation against the pale floss of her hair and turned with twinkling golden eyes and smiling scarlet lips to cull admiration which was the due of so vivid a harmony.

There is no smoking-room at Thorley," she told him as she rose from the table. "My grandfather smoked very much and then only in his own room. But you and I will provide a smoking place and Michael — poor fellow — his eyes will not even bear the smoke from others' cigars, so sit for us in the library. Will that be all right?" she asked, turning to him.

"Yes," he agreed. "I've some letters to write. While the boys and Johns are chatting, Brett and I'll get them done — he makes an excellent secretary, my old nurse," he added to her. "I'll never be able to get along without him. I don't want to bother about the letters now, but we leave on an early train, you know, before you are up, I think, Trix."

She nodded, and Johns followed her into a quaint little room with its silent old-fashioned piano and staid, high-backed chairs standing stiffly at attention. He smiled at the restful simplicity of the little old interior, and murmured as though his praise delighted her.

"I love it so," she said softly, "that it seems quite perfect."

"Still I must admit that it is not an ideal place for a smoking-room. So we'll have in those two big chairs — modern, comfortable things — thank you" — she seated herself in one of them, and he brought her and motioned him to the smoking-room — "and we'll astonish this straight-backed, conservative little room that goes on dreaming through the years by proving that the Thorleys are still Puritan and that the interior never changes."

He lit a cigar and Johns agreed mentally with her that such things are absurd; for who would have fancied, he decided of himself, that a middle-aged monomaniac named Michael Thwaites could sit down to a tête-à-tête with Michael Thwaites's little wife with such pleasant anticipation! With

whimsical humility Archibald Johns silently admitted that friends' marriages are not altogether so unjustifiable as their friends often judge them to be. He himself could surely adduce mitigating circumstances in this particular instance as he looked at the face opposite him, and even retract a judgment that had seemed to be based upon trustworthy evidence. And yet, his thought continued irritably, although he, Johns, was now so ready to revoke the decree of unsuitability, the two so closely concerned had evidently decided to assert and maintain it. In an infinity of small touches this had been made plain to-night, without his hosts having transgressed the bounds with which good breeding delimits difficult situations. And yet, to an outsider, a sympathetic, friendly outsider, who had so cordially reversed his own decision, the position of these two was so regrettable, so lamentably unaccountable.

It was a realization of how far he had gone that warned Johns he was warranted in going no further. To discipline thought, he broke into speech upon the first topic that suggested itself: "You used to smoke, did n't you, Mrs. Thwaites?" he asked, watching her fingers idly playing with the tray.

Evidently her thoughts, too, had travelled, for she looked up guiltily. "Why, yes — yes," she said and lit a cigarette. But she took it from her lips a moment later and put it from her. "Don't you think," she said, trying to explain the inconsequent action, "that one often does things merely because one has done them? And yet if one does n't, one's present self seems to be sitting in judgment upon the self of — of a year or six months ago. I — I don't want to disown a single thing Beatrix Thwaites ever did, that she's associated with in other people's minds as having

It would seem a — a treachery. . . . I wonder if you understand?" she asked, looking wistfully at him.

He shook his head. "I should like to disown things we've done," he said seriously. "I should very much like to disassociate myself from some impressions people must have of me. He is a fortunate man who lives to be my friend with nothing to regret, to forget."

But sometimes," she urged plaintively, "the old self is almost another self. One has n't any right —" she broke off quickly. "You surely, Mr. Johns, the radical leader of a protesting Third Party, would n't deduce anything unpleasant from the fact that a woman smokes?" "Not I." His response was immediate and her face flushed with satisfaction. "Only," he added whimsily, "I wish she would n't!"

Her eyes laughed over at him with a gracious friendliness, and she sat back in her chair with the air of one who decides that she can be wholly at ease with the situation. "What a charming old place you have here," he said. "I don't wonder Thwaites can't induce you to come back home. But is n't it a bit lonely for you, at times?"

He shook her head, looked at him as though she were about to speak, but closed her lips again; and then gazing wistfully out into the dusk, she said softly, after a few moments' silence, "The place is full, full of company — acquaintances or friends, but the dear, dear people of long ago. I am so near here, Mr. Johns, to" — her voice faltered, but she waited a moment and then added — "to my dear Thorley."

Johns looked up; at the name a tender grief buried in his heart stirred, and sorrowfully and slowly laid itself to

rest again. She saw its shadow in his eyes, for she put out a grateful hand to him before she spoke.

"It is little Tessy Thorley that's here with me — such a little thing, such a pathetic tiny creature with her loves and hopes and fancies! I love her as — as though she were my baby, the child of me that I long to help and give to and shield."

"It's a pretty fancy," he said, wondering if he should ever come to call Michael Thwaites's wife a motherly woman.

"You see," she went on more lightly, "of late years I've thought more of her sister, and I think I have neglected this dear little soul, who, somehow, seems to me to have stayed here. The Therese Thorley that went away when — when her grandfather died was lacking in something, I'm sure, that the little one had. Perhaps it's because she left so much of herself here. With Beatrix, it was different; her whole life is a consecutive impulse. She — she was always herself. But Tessy, it seems to me, lost something of that identity she used to be so jealous of."

And to illustrate she told him of the fantastic, childish play and the change of identities which invariably resulted in two Trixys and "no Tessy at all."

Her visitor listened, charmed. To be taken back thus intimately into the childhood of the girl he had loved, was an unspoken recognition of that love, very dear to him. And to find in his friend's wife so pretty and tender a strain of reminiscence was a revelation surprising and pleasing. When her childhood's memories began to include his friend the frank, affectionate tone of that remembrance gladdened though it puzzled him. The boy seemed very dear to her, he said to himself, part playmate, part big brother; but

she appeared to regard this as a perennially youthful memory and Michael as one of those companions of childhood from whom one becomes separated in later life, and so disassociates the boy from the man he has become. Or, rather, she seemed to choose to ignore that development.

A gradual perception of the abnormality of this point of view came upon her listener. Perhaps, he said to himself as he tried to analyze it, it was her deliberate intention mentally to raise a wall between the things of her childhood and of to-day; to draw a sharp distinction between past and present, since possibly some hidden emotion prevented their being related and reconciled. But this, it seemed to him, as he pursued his train of thought, might eventuate in the awarding of greater reality to the clearer, more definite and satisfactorily complete memory, rather than to an actual state of affairs in which her domestic relations, he felt obscurely, were strained and imperfect. There are natures, he knew, anchored so strongly, if singly, by their emotions that doubt of the force and value and permanency of feeling comes to them as the inevitable precursor of doubt of reality itself.

Johns had heard rumours, as most of her friends had, that Mrs. Thwaites was nervously affected as a result of her illness. Could it be, reluctantly he asked himself, that a delicate instrument like this woman's mind, weakened by illness and shock of separation from so dear a sister, and then left to brood by itself in the quiet deserted home of her childhood, had gone jangling out of tune with the actual world, though it made such sweet melodies when played upon by the little shadow-fingers of the past?

Almost involuntarily, so keen was the sense of intimacy her kindness had created, he found himself wording — not

his thought, but a tentative expression of such a possibility. And though the lighter accents of his most sympathetic voice disowned the fear behind the words, even as he uttered them, he looked over at her quickly, appealingly, his eyes beseeching her not to misunderstand, to accept the unspoken eagerness to serve her that was strong in him and to respond to the cordiality her own graciousness had called forth.

He was relieved when she turned to him with a frank comprehension of all he had said and much he could not have said. "Perhaps you are right," she said thoughtfully. "You mean that it is bad for one to live too much in the past and too little in the present — is that it?"

"Surely," he said, gratitude for her simple acceptance of him upon such a footing making his voice warm and kindly. "You are too young for that sort of thing. Leave retrospection to those of us who are getting to the time when we can see Life's circle closing, when earliest and latest memories must meet and intermingle. And to those who have nothing else. . . . You — forgive me — have so much."

She looked up at him, a wondering docility in her wide eyes, and he marvelled at the tenderness he felt for that slim-throated, boyish head that was so curiously, pathetically childlike.

"Do you think I have — really?" she asked. "My life seemed so ended. You can't know — but even without knowing —"

"You have Michael Thwaites's future in your hands," he said abruptly, striking for the friend he loved.

Her eyes grew timid, troubled. But his thoughts — so rarely far from the theme which ordered his life —

ere marching again to the rhythm of those dumb fifes and drums which ceaselessly call the civic altruist to action. ill, he tried to speak lightly, as he always did till carried away by his subject.

“It seems to a crank like me,” he said, with a shrug, “that ere is not a better piece of work on earth to do, for one pair woman’s hands, than to strengthen and hearten a man ce Michael Thwaites: — not because he ’s your husband, t because he ’s my friend, but because his own attainments d standing, together with my scheming and plotting, have mbined to make him one of those ordinary, unromantic, ery-day heroes — one of those standard-bearers in the bitter ht that every municipality in America is waging to-day, s waged, or will wage, against the common enemy. . . . gainst the same enemy, rather; in one city it is called Var- y and United Power, in another it is Brown and the street- r system, in a third it is Jones and standard oil, in a fourth in all, it is railroads. But the real name, the name that bels it in every honest man’s breast is Greed; greed for undeserved favours, for unjust perquisites, for unfair privi- ges. It is the fight in our times and with more modern eapons that was fought in Rome, in France, and at Valley rge. It ’s the old battle of the outraged many against the edatory few. It ’s the struggle of democracy for opportu- ty against a monopolizing trust aristocracy. It ’s the rld-old, hand-to-hand warfare against oppression, but ice oppression nowadays is legally intrenched and money- ight, it ’s the war really against Wealth — cruel, thieving ealth; unjust, immoral, rapacious wealth that wants and ants and never ceases from wanting, because that is its one instinct, its one purpose, its one gratification, the one way which it can grow. And it is growing, following the one

law of its being, even though that growth bars the door of opportunity in the boy's face, robs a man of the just proceeds of his labour, chains a woman to drudgery and even limits the amount of milk in a baby's bottle or in its mother's breast. Yes, it's the old, old enemy. It has always been. It will always be. No one knows more truly than the man who battles against it that you can't kill Greed. But, good God! is that a reason for ceasing to struggle with it? Shall a man put what he has, little or big, behind its broad, gluttonous back, through cowardice or indifference or hopelessness? Or shall he take his place in the ranks of the political protestants, the holy minority, the salt of earth through the ages that keeps man's belief in man alive?"

She was leaning forward, her elbows on her knees, her chin in her hands, listening to him entranced. He had taken her out of herself; he had lifted her from the treadmill of impotent thought; he had pointed out a way when it seemed to her she could neither stay where she was nor move a step; he had opened a window through which her soul, stifling in perplexing personalities and waiting vainly for light to lead to action, might look out upon the breezy largeness of a common effort for common humanity, an effort toward which there could be no contribution too small, none great enough.

"Oh," she murmured, throwing out her arms with the full, open gesture of the liberated, "it almost seems as though it did n't matter about me or you or Michael or — or anyone, only so far as we could be of use, could help!"

Johns caught her outstretched hands. "I wish to God," he said earnestly, "that I could make you believe so. For I believe it's the divinest truth in all the world."

CHAPTER XVIII

A NEW content had come to Michael Thwaites. Just when life was stormiest and he dared not look ahead, so threatening were the clouds that blackened his horizon, a curious sudden lull had come and his boat slipped into a peaceful inland sea, still sombrely overcast, but broad and serene.

Here, it seemed to him, he and his wife lay becalmed. He could not deceive himself, they were not sailing on to the goal for which he had originally embarked; but the port they had reached might have been the very one she had set sail for, so unconscious she appeared of the desirability of moving on. And Michael, a proud man, disciplined by the affliction that had revolutionized his mental life, acquiesced. Only once he alluded, with vague regret, to the scene between them on the last evening they had quarrelled. It was with no idea of reconciliation that he spoke; the pale truce of peace between them was too new and too welcome. Evidently she, too, felt this — he noted with relief and yet with a bit of chagrin — for, after listening quietly, she as quietly dismissed the subject in the way that had become familiar to him. "I have forgotten it," she said. And illogically he was vexed with her utter self-command. And once, in the early spring, when she had yielded to his urging to quit the seclusion her physicians thought harmful, and she had come into town to hear an opera, he bent forward in the box, stirred by Siegmund's love-song which they had heard last

together one wonderful warm night in Munich on their wedding journey, and touched her shoulder; but the clear purity of her eyes, untroubled by memory, as she turned for his explanation, chilled and sobered him.

Possession of the passion-sweet girl he had married had burned emotions into Michael's soul it might never forget; but there were other sides of his nature which, as tenaciously, kept their remembrance. Of a magnanimous nature, he had been humiliated to discover how small a place is left to generosity when anger and resentment are vitally stirred. A man of sensitive perceptions and a certain purity of taste, he had been shamed by the necessities of circumstances, as he saw them, or seemed to see them. His very pugnacity and assertiveness were negative indices, in the completer man, of an ideal which could not conceive of the exercise of those qualities in certain directions; the use of such tools in the enforcement of what might be termed axiomatic situations — so obvious, he felt, was their obligation — blisters the hand that holds them, and leaves scars on memory long after the burns have healed and pain is dead.

There are Antæus-like natures whose relations with life are freshened and strengthened by contact with the stinging earthiness of humanity's littleness; they rebound and philosophically look back on their descent from the heights of dignity, as upon a trival excursion easily accomplished and as readily forgotten. But there are those that carry with them ever after a remorseful conviction of having been untrue to self, of having brothered a thing they despise.

So in Michael Thwaites passion held her breath, while philosophy and habit and the placid poise of the woman beside him ordered his life. His days were full, brimming with scope for all the talents he possessed now that the

campaign had begun, and there was demand for all his resources and the employment of so much of his time, that he was content just to drift in the hours he and his wife were together. And drifting was pleasant, for since she had begun to share with him eagerly in the fight he was making, another tie had been formed between them, a placid impersonality of mutual interests that was as pleasing as it was novel to him.

Thwaites had had no sister; he had no knowledge of that close, almost sexless, but exquisitely sex-full companionship between grown sons and their young mothers; he had known women intimately in only one relationship, and at a time when passionate youth joys in detecting sex-differences, not in searching for human resemblances. Knowledge of the sort that keeps the soul prisoned in its own shell Michael had, where women were concerned; comprehension of that divine sympathy which overleaps even barriers of sex he felt he could have had if his mother had lived. As he became older, he seemed to himself to grow closer to a masculine likeness of her temperament; he found his thoughts dwelling upon her, and was surprised himself that he spoke of her often to his wife.

He looked in vain for similar confidences from her. Since the day of their explanation she had never mentioned her sister to him, and it was on her physicians' advice that he had long refrained from opening the subject. But as soon as his mind had been relieved of anxiety for her recovery, he had written to Tess, addressing the letter in care of the Naples office of the steamship company, on whose line Dick had taken passage. He had waited long for an answer, but within a few days, upon his writing to the Naples office for information, the letter

had been returned to him. He laid it on his wife's plate one morning at breakfast, shortly after their return to town for the winter. "If you know her address, Trix," he said, after going over the facts, "won't you forward this for me?"

She was terribly unprepared, and sat staring at the envelope before her, at a loss what to say; her face was white and bewildered, and she was thinking so deeply that she was unconscious of a slight trembling that shook her from head to feet.

"My dear," said Michael bending solicitously toward her, "don't be so agitated and — and please don't shut me out from knowledge of Tessy. I loved her, too, you know."

She lifted miserable eyes to him. "But I don't know where she is," she said.

"Ah!" He nodded. "They must be travelling under another name. Why, in God's name!" He struck his hands angrily together. "Are they mad? Tess is the sort of brave little fool who would wear shame like a coronet, glorying defiantly in ostracism for one she loved. But how dare he — how dare Dick Matthewson! How can he be sure he won't have to account to me!"

Vainly she tried to speak, and he, regretting his violence that aggravated her agitation, resumed in a quieter tone: "Forgive me. I ought to remember how uncertain your nerves still are. Will you keep the letter and some day, when you do hear from her, send it? Or perhaps" — he broke the seal, and opening the sheet, held it out to her — "perhaps you'll read what I have written and inclose it with your own letter."

She made no motion to take the paper from him.

"Please," he urged. "It is a scrawl," he added, more
hly, "as most things are that I write myself."

She nodded. The colour had come back to her face
d she tried to speak calmly. "If ever you have letters
at you would n't care for Brett to see, perhaps I could
ite them for you."

"Why, thank you, that 's awfully good of you," he said,
voice warm with a rare boyish intonation. "Sometimes
not often — but I will take advantage of that offer.
ow, will you read my letter to Tess?"

She looked at him wistfully. She longed yet feared to read
at he had written. But she took the sheet and, praying
calm, she read it through, though slowly, for at the end her
es were blurred and her breast was heaving with emotion:

'MY VERY DEAR SISTER TESSY [Michael had written — his
ong, precise chirography, lacking eye-guidance, was wavering
w, large and undecided]:

"Although this step of yours may bewilder and grieve those who
e and respect you, it does not lessen that love and respect. I
nk that, so far as I am concerned, you know this; nevertheless
wish to remind you that you have a faithful friend who is
dy to help, without questioning, in whatever way circumstances
y render necessary.

"My dear, my dear, let me say just this: A woman may not war
ainst convention. Brave as you are, firm and devoted as I
ow your affections to be, even you cannot win in this absurd
d tragic old tape-tied, futile fight, whose end is foreordained.
or whatever reason you are out of the fold (and no reason of
urs could be base or selfish or merely flippantly daring) come in,
ar, come in. It is good, not only to be good, but to appear so;
is right to be honest with the world, however banal convention
ay seem. But, in or out, Tessy, here 's my hand and all of a
ian's strength and experience at your service if ever, or whenever
ou make the call. Let me help — please.

MICHAEL."

Sobs were clutching Tessy's throat. Vainly she tried to re-read the letter, longing for delay, praying for composure. But a terrible power lay behind those simple words to call up one who had not been unworthy of brotherly tenderness; a power to recreate a self that was all an accusing voice, demanding of her why it had neither the joy of living nor the peace of death; why it was not even a memory such as this.

"My dear — my dear!" cried Michael, following her as she rose and, weeping convulsively, hurried to the door.

"Don't — please — let me go!" she sobbed.

"No — no. Why not stay — why not let me help you to bear it?" he begged, shaken by her grief.

She shook her head, a passionate negation.

"Listen — listen, Trix," he urged, "we'll go to find them together, you and I, after election. Whichever way it goes there will be a few months, and we'll use them to hunt up those two mad things and straighten it all out. Will that please you?"

She looked up at him a moment, smiling wistfully through her tears. "How — how good you are!" she stammered. It was a revelation to her; she had not known this strong black Michael's voice could be so gentle, so tender. "If — I had only known —"

"Good!" he exclaimed. A sudden cry for her surged in him. "Sweetheart," he whispered taking her in his arms, "Gold-Trix, let's try again!"

But she tore herself from him. Her throbbing breast was still, her tears were checked, but her white face was turned upon him in amazement and terror.

When she reached her room she was still numb with the

ck; she stood in frozen silence staring at herself in mirror with incredulous, horrified eyes, or mechanically picking up an article from the dressing-table laying it down again, with an automaton-like poselessness.

There were no tears now; she seemed to have been cken with a strange, waiting numbness. All she could sure of was that there would soon be something to nk out; something she was going to meet, that was on its y to break the passivity that held her.

It came at length with the sound of Michael's voice in hall, giving a last order to his secretary before he left house. His was a deep voice, carrying, despite its courtesy, an imperious note, the unconsciously sharp, strong fibre of the masterful man. It was that voice — Tessy had, as she heard the front door close behind him and nd herself suddenly in the turbulent depths of the excuse t accuses — that justified her. Rightly or wrongly had taken that as the key to his character; with that e of dominance sounding in all with which she associated t, she had accepted her sister's estimate of him as one the unforgiving, placing him among the immovably ng who suffer less in their affections than in their pride,) cannot love where they must excuse, who stoically off and cast from them the offending memory that would ind them of their humanity. How could she know had another self hidden in the unplumbed depths of his ire? How could she know he had another voice, ten- soft, vibrant? How could she know he had such love might have been great enough even for forgiveness? . . . It was a helpless crying out of her shaken it, a terrified beseeching to herself to come to the rescue

and name the reasons, repeat the arguments that had justified her.

She wrung her hands as, sentient now of this terrible crisis in every nerve, she paced the floor; for quick upon her agonized questions had followed the questioning answer: How had she dared! How dare play Fate in human lives! How presume to know what love may lie potential in the hearts of mankind, waiting for the tender rain of suffering to soften and stir it! How venture audaciously to lay inexperienced hands upon that gossamer fabric of common memories which binds husbands and wives indissolubly, despite the wayward ways of men and women?

Wildly she said them over to herself, her feeble pleas of circumstance, of helplessness, of drifting weakly perhaps but inevitably, of fear, of pity for the two, and a mad hope of saving all by the interposition of self.

A silly sacrifice, a presumptuous, cowardly sacrifice, cried Conscience, an impudent, dishonourable imposture made possible by a physical resemblance she had been base enough to trade upon!

But yet, a well-meaning, kindly offering, she pleaded. What could she have done? What in the world should she have done? What would have —

The answer came quick, a merciless sentence cutting the thread of her thought and, it seemed to her for a moment, the very ground from under her. There is no alternative for the truth. (She almost heard the words.) What she should have done was precisely what she could and should do now — tell the truth.

For a minute or two her defense was paralyzed; but soon came visions of results, troubled, distorted, hurrying visions of those dearest to her plunged into yet more distasteful

explanation, into deeper disgrace by her tardy revelation. Oh, she could n't, she could n't do it, she cried. Perhaps she should have done it, she would concede that much, but not of her own volition would she be the instrument now of punishment and affliction. Say that she had forfeited the blessings of atonement, since to set things right at this late day signified sorrow intensified by the tangle her foolish, daring hands had wrought! She would do without atonement. She would face and accept whatever might come in case of exposure, even to the admission that, though at first she had felt her motives to be lofty and unselfish, at the end she had sunk with them to the cowardly level of expediency.

Again she made the choice. She would take consequences, though now that uneasy, racking doubt might never quit her. How could she have dreamed that her single-hearted wish to spare these two could hold such blundering possibilities of disaster! The exclamation burst from her, a passionate appeal from her own accusation. How could she have done other than she had without baring the disgrace of one and the dishonour of the other to all who knew them, at a time when Michael's political prominence would have made knowledge of it a world-wide scandal which might — who knows? — have blasted his last precious chance! What sister (she was carried on now by her exaltation, till she experienced again the rapt mood which had first made the thing seem possible) what loving, unselfish human being, placed as she had been with the providential weapon of identical resemblance to shatter suspicion like a magic sword, fate-forged in the past, would have acted otherwise? It meant deceit? Of course. Trickery? Yes. Disclosure and humiliation? Possibly. But one who fights a great fight, in whose victory even when won is no triumph for self,

that one can afford to take chances, and is justified even in the employment of weapons such as this.

What was the alternative, triumphantly she demanded of herself? When one's best-beloved risks dishonour, one prays that she may be spared the consequences of her act; but when one is strong and armed and true to the ideal of a lifetime, prayer is transformed into action and loses none of its holiness by gaining in effectiveness. Now she could face her image in the glass (which stood vaguely for another, inquisiting self) and with burning cheeks and shining eyes, challenge it to make her afraid, to bid her regret, to compel her to turn weakly back now, now when her very assumption of that other identity had made turning back incredible, impossible! And she was glad of it, she said to herself, glad of it! She had not known she could be weak enough to regret, nor could she have anticipated such a contingency; but, strong or weak, no other path was open now. She must go ahead, since she could not go back. Therefore she would, and that was all there was to it! And she turned her back upon the accusing face in the glass, as though with physical finality upon the past.

But, though she resolutely faced the future, the clamorous, betraying voice of self-exculpation accompanied her, put her still upon the defensive. She had not planned deliberately to do this thing, her thought went wearily on. Indeed, at first she had only taken advantage of a misconception to gain time to think it all over, to wait till she grew strong enough to face the difficult situation and make the best of it. Almost, she pleaded, she had been forced into taking up the rôle which her Beatrix had so impetuously, so heartlessly, dropped at a moment's notice.

No — she withdrew the words even as they formed in her

In a way, a dear, intimate way, Trix was her very self. All that gay, thoughtless life of hers was the bright Tess's own puritanical self; it was subtly the pagan in her, whether she approved or disapproved. And it was she who felt obscurely when, in assuming Beatrix's part, she felt bound in honour to play it as an understudy, not a principal rôle.

It looked at in its simplest phase, had it not been her habit to condone, to share, charitably to interpret and excuse one's faults? And it was such an empty part Trix was en playing — the unloved, unloving wife, living a life that convention might not be shocked. And for her son, too, and for the greater reasons of love and pity, she had herself undertaken to play the same hollow rôle. Was her arm in this more than the other? Who would acquit one must absolve the other, since the holy shams of convention were held sacred by both.

Attention! She turned upon herself. Had it come to her? Was she lying even to herself? Was this the same disingenuous conduct upon character? "You fool poor, lying fool!" she cried aloud in her bitterness. 't convention you 're afraid of; it is not convention sinned against. It 's Michael of the tender voice, the man who might have pardoned, and Trix, who might be forgiven."

She went down before that terrible thought. On her knees she rocked in despair and humiliation. And in an inarticulate prayer, striving to see clearly, struggling against every confusing thought of merciful indirection, she was rendered. She would own her fault. Broken, she made her decision. She would confess to the wrong she had wronged and accept what judgment he should

pronounce, in addition to the knowledge of the suffering that she had caused him.

The peace of decision fell upon her after awhile, the calm that comes with respite from tormenting doubt, and her spirit rested in the tranquillity that follows suspense and precedes action. But then, in the very relaxation of relief, her over-wrought brain, shrinking yet fascinated, hurried on to anticipation. What she saw ahead daunted her. Yet only for a minute. Her resolution held; but she declared for a postponement. This was not the time, she felt, to deal such a blow, when a man's every nerve was tense with the exigent demands of a pitiless political campaign. It could not be right to trouble Michael now, to burden him with the solution of such a problem. She had carried it so long, a few weeks more could make no difference, she pleaded with herself. And so she compromised.

She warmed with the thought of serving him a little longer and then, as though to reward her, the memory of his letter came to her, the words she had read a few hours ago which had been written to her very self; not to the girl she had been, nor to the woman she had become, but to that precious unreality — his conception of her.

She spread open the letter before her and re-read it. In her agitation, her emotional exaltation, it was inevitable that she should read into it understanding and forgiveness of the unknown as well as the supposed fault, and even sympathetic encouragement for the task of confession which lay ultimately before her. Every phrase her eye fell upon she could but interpret as strangely applicative, though written to meet an unreal situation. She folded the letter and pressed it gratefully to her turbulent heart,

was so peculiarly hers, so opportune, so exquisitely dear. And then, suddenly, she realized that it was not comprehension and forgiveness, but his comprehension and forgiveness, that meant all this to her.

Wildly she started to her feet as though to fly. Then she fell on her knees again before the bed, with arms outflung, she hid her face from eyes she felt, though none was there to

“Oh, Trixy, Trixy,” she moaned, “don’t — don’t look at me — I’m ashamed!”

CHAPTER XIX

IT WAS inevitable that such a man as Johns should be crowded out of his party. Regularity has no place for the non-conformer, no sympathy for the vivid brain and warm heart of the man who fails to find remedies in existing political panaceas. In the picturesque vocabulary of politics there are all sorts of uncomplimentary names that humorously classify him. To his brethren of greater patience with other people's misfortunes and more philosophy for their own, his clamour for change is an unpractical, unreasonable demand for the immediate advent of the millenium. The result, of course, is ridicule, which is at once the average man's protection against the unbalanced and confession of his own limitations.

The further Johns strayed from well-defined political boundaries, the greater joke he became to those who stayed snugly within walls, carefully avoiding individual responsibility and nestling into the syndicated security of the two great political trusts. The workingmen's unions, that had formed a nucleus for the Third Party he battled so long for, were denounced by their shocked sister-unions with something of that imputation of sacrilege, of treachery, of unspeakable horror which the blushing and protesting anti-suffragist nowadays feels for the bold outlaws of her sex, who would shame her womanhood by offering it a voice in her country's affairs.

The history of a third party's efforts toward existence is the history of attempted independence in all monopolized business. While it was weak and negligible, it was rendered absurd. When it grew stronger it was offered one-sided compromise. When this was rejected it was punished, almost annihilated. When it lifted itself and in time came to hold the balance of power between the two big bullies, each danced before it, a political Salome, asking for the other's head. Yet even then both were ready to call a truce just long enough for them to unite to discipline it.

But there was one man beside Johns who saw clearly and early its ultimate purpose and possible destiny. The reigning Boss was an able, shrewd, unscrupulous Hessian, versatile and independent in politics, though carefully labelled with a party's badge, whose considerable talents were for sale to the highest bidder; sometimes even to both highest and lowest bidders, but with a personal preference for the buyer who rated the things he had for sale at the greatest figure. It was not often that he, as the Mayor's accredited broker, sold the same thing twice; but there had been occasions when a personal caprice or a bit of malice (and from such weakness even gods and bosses cannot always be free) had induced him to change his mind about selling to one of the purchasers without returning either purchase-price.

The result meant enemies for the Boss, powerful ones, smarting under his contempt and their own, men as unprincipled as himself, who bribed without a qualm, but who writhed with shame at being cheated. It was one of these who first revealed to Johns an authentic instance of that corruption which most men suspected, which few denied, but which none could prove. It was he who for

the sake of revenge became actively public-spirited, since revenge could be had in no lesser way; he never wearied in well-doing, so base was his motive; he sacrificed much of business time that was money, so keen was his desire to punish — not the one who had debauched his city, but the one who had betrayed himself. He put such thought upon the matter as would have served to keep his party's primaries clean and honourable and to make bossism itself impossible, if men would do for their bleeding municipality a tithe of what they will for a scratch to personal vanity. And, finally — so thirsty he was for revenge, so nearly related in spirit to the crafty Boss he longed to destroy — he concocted an elaborate scheme of betrayal on his own part. He organized a company and appealed to the city for a franchise. He negotiated with the Boss who, being a frank and busy free-booter, bore him no ill-will for having tricked him, and terms were arranged between them. That they were even better terms than he had expected was due to the magnanimity of the Boss, to a delicately unexpressed feeling that, after all, some reparation was due an old customer, a cheated old customer.

But the ungrateful old customer was not so fastidious; he violated all tradition by referring to a matter which piratical good taste would have considered closed. He had paid the price once, he said, and had been defrauded. He was ready to pay again, but payment this time, he submitted, should be made for his protection in the presence of the Mayor who, in receiving his share from the Boss, must guarantee the customer against a repetition of his previous unfortunate experience. For perhaps after all, argued the old customer, that official might never have received his due proportion of the tribute-money; a possi-

lity which would account for his having failed graciously look out for the customer's interests.

But this was an imputation which, partly because it happened to be true, no honorable scoundrel could permit. He insulted Boss forgot his sense of humour and his secret delight in having cozened this customer; his big, burly face rose in wrath, and his big, burly body followed it. At the other was big and burly, too; so they quarrelled and, having measured each other, fell in, instead of out, as thieves do nowadays when one is determined not to retreat, but to overreach the other.

Honest men, in the persons of Archibald Johns and a detective, were invited to witness the transaction from a convenient hiding-place; and the scheme was carried out — but only so far as the Boss was concerned. In the very act of acceptance the Mayor's ready hand faltered and, suddenly scenting danger, he sprang to the place of concealment and threw open the doors. There was a quick second of mutual discovery and then the Mayor — who really must have been more than a puppet, so swift was his decision and so excellent his assumption of outraged honour — called upon the detective to arrest the customer for attempting to bribe an official. The Boss was not slow to take his cue and loudly he declared his knowledge of the trap and his determination to trap the trapper. And the trapper, disgusted by failure, yet sustained, possibly, by the loftiness of his motives, quickly made his escape and sailed for Europe the next day.

A watchful silence followed. Johns, prematurely unasked and lacking absolute proof of official complicity, could take no steps. He sent word, however, to the guilty Boss, inviting him to confession and offering him exemption

from prosecution when the municipal day of judgment should come. But the Boss, though shaken by the first real threat of discovery, was no mean lawyer, and returned a good-natured response to the effect that hares must invariably be caught before being cooked. Johns's greeting that followed dwelt upon the strong probability of hares being ultimately caught, and the folly of their falling into pits dug for bigger game. The Boss wittily replied that amateur sportsmen were proverbially optimistic and that inexperience sometimes renders their ambition ridiculous, and may even absurdly reverse the positions of hunter and hunted; he recommended this particular hunter to be sure that his gun was loaded before he pulled the trigger.

And there the interchange of civilities stopped. But the Boss was not so contented with the situation as he sought to appear. For the tale of a trap had spread quickly among those who had cause to fear one, and had brought with it doubt and distrust. Every municipal free-lance, in however small a way he was engaged in looting his city, was suspicious of his brothers; every little remunerative bartering adventure smelled of the hunter's hands. In the general panic traffic in things that may not be put up for sale was at a standstill. Fear could not make rogues honest; it did make them cautious. And the Mayor, now having melancholy assurance of what he had long suspected — that there is no honour, even among thieves — eyed his broker askance and counted the cost of getting rid of him.

It was to avoid this most costly possibility that clean-fingered gentlemen (who had merely bought — not sold — unlawfully) bent themselves seriously to allied warfare upon the one who had troubled their peace. Though diligent and determined, they failed in effectiveness mainly

because of the scant personal hold Johns had upon social life. They caused him much uneasiness, the loss of some money and a few of the few friends he had. But, as has been said, they discovered finally that long years of discipline had made of him a dogged battle-ship whose decks were always cleared for action, left with nothing to grace or weaken it. The blundering attack upon Michael followed and, after Brocato's appeal for his victim's forgiveness, Archibald Johns's persistent industry turned to this other scent.

He hunted up Brocato; found him, after much difficulty, shivering beside the stove in a room back of Tracy's saloon. The Sicilian was sick with misery, dying of superstitious fear. It was not a matter of conscience, for Brocato had none. He cursed himself as bitterly as did his friend Tracy for having told the priest; but having told, he was helplessly bound to take what his confessor meted out to him. He had half-murdered a number of times and wholly killed once, and had kept the matter from the priest with as little scruple as a man hides an ugly detail of his business from his wife, for whose unpractical point of view he has no respect but some fear.

But Brocato had never before requited a benefit with an injury. Gratitude was a religion to him, particularly gratitude to the girl who had helped his erring young wife, discarded, dying of misery in the streets. It seemed obscurely to the Sicilian that in doing this Miss Thorley had lifted remorse from his shoulders; had, in a measure, negated that regretted moment of wrath and made it almost as though it had not been, by stepping in between him and vengeance, like some blue-robed saint in nurse's attire, and ministering to the wife he had turned out of doors, yet had loved with all the passion of his jealous soul.

And in return he, Brocato, had by a spiteful chance brought injury to a man dear to her, his creditor! It was enough, he was convinced, to bring a just curse upon him, even without his confessor's stern admonition.

Helplessly and almost hopelessly Brocato made pilgrimages to Number 17 Panhandle Place. He had a vague idea that in some magical way absolution might come through those ministering hands that had lifted his wife. But they told him at the Settlement that Miss Thorley had gone away and they had had no word from her. So after a time he gave up going there and, like a dog whose presence is merely suffered, sat beside Tracy's fire and shivered while he waited for the fate, obscure but terrible, that was to overtake him. He had ceased to work; he had almost ceased to eat, and breathing was burdensome to him. But his secondary creed — that of the thug, which was only less sacred to him than his religion — was still strong within him; he would not betray. He should not live, perhaps, since the curse was on him, but he could not exchange that for another malediction.

Some of this — not much — he managed to convey to Johns; or, rather, Johns elicited by means of patient questioning. He learned quickly that if his queries called for more than a monosyllabic response, they remained unanswered. If Brocato could reply with a negative shake of the head or a nod, there was a limited amount of information at his questioner's disposal. When more than this was demanded of him, he relapsed into dumb misery. And Johns left him at last, hoping to think out by himself some means of reconciling a thug's conscience with his loyalty to his fraternity.

When he returned the next day Brocato had disappeared,

and Tracy, before the door of his saloon, his hat on the back of his head, his hands jingling the coins in his pocket, spoke in a concerned, purring voice of the "poor divvle of a dago" who had lost his mind and wandered out into the streets. But if Tracy's voice was concerned, his eyes were not; they shone with significance and twinkled with enjoyment. And the message they carried is not translatable into ordinary English, but Johns understood.

Tracy realized the extent of that understanding during the next few days when the detectives Johns had hired probed and searched and schemed and found nothing. It was not Tracy's fault that they found nothing; with malicious ardour he planted clues for them to follow, misleading traces for them to stumble upon, false facts to occupy and delude them. "The Wavy-eared, bein' perfectly safe," he explained with a chuckle to a friend, "a man can let hisself have a little fun." "Sure! And where have ye put him?" asked that friend, who had listened with flattering enjoyment. "That's for ol' man Johns to find out," Tracy answered dryly.

That answer Tracy's friend carried disconsolately to the detective who had employed him. It finally reached Johns himself, who repeated it to Michael Thwaites one evening when he called and found his friend, with his wife and his secretary, busily engaged in providing work for both.

"It seems to me as definite and satisfactory an answer as we're likely to get," Michael commented grimly.

Johns nodded. "But it's such a pretty scheme to give up," he said regretfully.

"What is?" asked Tessy, looking up from a note she was writing. "Tell me, Mr. Johns, just what significance had that pretty scheme of yours?"

He crossed over to her, delighted at her interest. "Will you let me tell it to you, even if it is a scheme that failed?" he asked. "This is it: I'd schemed to get this man Brocato to implicate another man ——"

"Named Tracy," assented Tessa.

". . . who would implicate another man ——"

"Ye boss!" she exclaimed, her eyes alight.

He nodded. "Who would put it up finally to *the* other man."

"Curtis Varney."

"You know your political catechism thoroughly, Mrs. Thwaites," he said with a smile. "But we don't care for Varney's being connected with a trifling matter — I'm speaking seriously — like the attack on one man's life; we want the Boss to confess to us, for good and sufficient reasons, the graver crimes of Curtis Varney, the killing of men's opportunities and the corrupting of the city's soul. That's what we want. That's what Brocato might perhaps have led us to; that, and Michael Thwaites's election incidentally."

"I don't exactly see how," she said.

"Neither do I, exactly; I wish I did. But there's a possibility, and if ever I get Brocato, I'll find the way."

"I wonder," she said hesitatingly, "if I could help."

"Trix!" Michael exclaimed, his displeasure evident in his quickly lifted head and firm-set lips.

She laughed. "Behold, Mr. Johns," she cried, "the average man, who invites his wife to share his lot with him, and wakes and claims all her interest in the particular business that engrosses him — and then looks like Michael Thwaites does now at the thought of her daring to act like an individual human being and wanting to be of real

assistance to him! Do you remember that old Pandolfini, of whom I once spoke to you, Michael's prototype a few centuries ago? 'Those husbands enrage me,' he growls naïvely, 'who take counsel with their wives!' Perhaps I could n't help, after all," she added, "but ——"

"You can — you do," interrupted Michael. "You know you do. But why should you be mixed up in such an affair as this Brocato business?"

She did not answer, but listened smilingly while the two further discussed the question. But Johns received a telephone message from her two days later asking him to meet her late that afternoon at Number 17 Panhandle Place.

He was earlier at the appointment than the hour she had named, and he waited a few minutes for her in Miss Gregory's company. She surprised them both by coming in dressed in the nurse's gown and cap.

"My dear, you're a born actress — I always said you were. Why, I'd believe I had Therese Thorley back here!" was Anne's affectionate greeting. "How I wish I had," she added.

"How I wish you had," said Tessy slowly; she paled a bit as she met Johns's keen, puzzled eyes, then added with an effort at playfulness, "It's just one of those changes of clothes and identity we two used to delight in when we were little. I've a reason for this, though, believe me."

She spoke hesitatingly, moved herself at the thought of all that had passed since last she wore the brave little uniform. And then she fell into silence. Nor did Johns speak at once, so strong was the passion of regret roused by sight of her; she looked so like — she was so like. . . . And now he could not speak, for a sudden, improbable, fantastic

solution of all that had puzzled him in his friend Thwaites's domestic relations presented itself. In his amazement he stared at the girl before him and she, meeting his questioning, searching gaze, flushed to her temples and paled again. It was a relief to both when the sound of a cane tapping on the stairs came to them and, with a hurried request to him to wait, she ran out into the hall.

"Limpety — Limpety Jim!" she cried; they heard her voice break with the emotion it carried. "How big and fine you've grown — how much good it did you! I am so glad, so glad!"

"But I say, Miss T'orley!" cried the boy.

"But you must n't, Jim," she interrupted quickly. "I sent you word Miss Thorley wanted to see you. So she does — so she does, and would squeal with delight, as I did, to see how straight you are and strong. But — but you must call me Mrs. Thwaites, Limpety, or — or you need n't say my name, but — only help me."

"Oh ——" the boy's voice was cold with suspicion. "You're the other one. What d' ye want me to do?"

She went over to where he had taken a chair and put her hands on his shoulders. Johns from the inner room could see her, without being seen, as she stood beside the boy, her head bent to catch his averted eyes. "I want you, Jim, to remember the day you came to the hospital here months ago," she pleaded.

"Yep!" he said resentfully. "The day she ran off with the Rev.-Dick and took him away from us all."

"Yep," she repeated after him, smiling wistfully, "but the day Doctor Thwaites changed you from a cripple into a man. It was the very last thing he did, Jim, before he gave up his work."

The boy nodded. She waited. He stirred uneasily in his chair. "She — she promised she'd have him there when I woke up," he murmured scowling, "an' she knew all the time she was going off with him."

There was a moment's pause; Johns, who watched her fascinated, saw her lean tenderly toward the boy. "She did n't — she did n't know, Jim," she said in a low voice.

He looked up and their eyes met. "'Pon your soul?" he demanded.

"'Pon my soul," she said slowly. "She did n't know then, and she remembered her promise to you and tried — tried to keep it, though her mind and her heart were full — that night!"

The low, ingenuous voice faltered and fell. It stirred in Johns a passion he had thought buried deep. Evidently its sincerity touched the boy, too. "What d' ye want me to do?" he asked again.

She was satisfied with the intonation this time. "Tell me where Joe Brocato is," she said.

He shook his head.

"Why not?"

He rose from his chair; but she held his cane and, reaching out her arm, put his hand upon it as a substitute. The pretty little action troubled him. "Wavy's in trouble, he is," he growled reluctantly. "I ain't goin' to hand him over to you all."

"Not if I promise, 'pon my soul, that he won't be hurt?"

He shook his head.

"Not even to let us have a talk with him? Just one square talk anywhere he wants it to be?"

The boy hesitated. "He's afraid," he said slowly.

"Shorty Tracy's scared him half to death by sayin' ol' Johns 'll torture him if he won't squeal."

"Do you believe that nonsense?" she asked quickly.

He did not answer.

"Do you?" she demanded imperiously, with a little tug at his shoulder. "Do you think that Therese Thorley would ask you to put a friend in the way of a thing like that?"

He lifted his eyes to look at her. "I don't, but she — she ain't here," he said bewildered, as though his tongue hesitated to speak so evident an untruth. "Wavy himself tried to find you lots of times but ——" He stopped confused.

Her hand dropped from his shoulder and she held out his cane to him.

"I — I say, Miss," the boy said reconsidering, "I 'll tell you where he is to-morrow night."

"You will!" she cried, offering both her hands. "I promise you no harm will come to him — surely."

But he did not take her outstretched hands. He hung his head as he walked across the room, and at the head of the stairs he stood fidgeting till finally he burst out shamefacedly, "I said that, 'cause he won't be here to-morrow."

"Oh!" She caught and held him. "He's going away. They're sending him away. Where?"

He did not answer.

"Tell me," she insisted. "Limpety, you must tell me."

The boy's rough little face worked. "You won't keep him from going?"

"No."

"Promise?"

"I promise."

"Well — an' he won't be hurt nohow?"

"No."

"Sure?"

"Sure."

"Well — well, what good 'll it do you to know if he 's going to-morrow morning?"

"This: I 'll send somebody to go with him, to talk to him on the way."

"Clear back to Sicily!" exclaimed the boy.

She hesitated, but quickly Johns came to her rescue. "Yes, clear back to Sicily," he called, hurrying out to where they stood. "And I 'll take you, too, and bring you back if you want to come."

The rest was quickly arranged with the excited boy, Johns settling details with an unhesitating peremptoriness that swept aside every obstacle. She turned to him, after the boy had gone, her face alight with satisfaction which, with a pretty, comrade-like frankness, she sought to share with him. But the intent determination in his eyes, as steadily, questioningly, he held hers till they fell, sobered and warned her. "Can — can you spare the time to go," she stammered, "so near to election?"

"Oh, yes," he said indifferently. "I can get back a few days before. But — I am leaving something that's infinitely dearer to me." His words came with a rush now and she trembled under his scrutiny.

"Surely," she said, with an attempt at lightness, as she turned toward the sitting room, "it must be something terrifically interesting to take Mr. Johns's mind off his work at such a time as this. Perhaps you 'll tell me what it is as we go back to town. I 'll put my hat and coat on and go in with you if you 'll take me home."

When she left him she knew that he stood thoughtfully looking after her, and her heart was beating with apprehension as she got ready for the drive. Her life had become so terribly complex, its potentialities appalled her. But her determination to set all straight within a short time gave her courage to regard each difficulty she had to face now as a temporary adventure, through which she must pass as creditably as might be, since anyway the end was near.

She came out into the hall in a great fur coat, her face hidden in the folds of her mauve veil. She was chatting gay farewells to Anne Gregory and she seemed so different to Johns, that he had the impression of one who wakes from a fantastic dream whose deceptive reality leaves an after-feeling of tricked bewilderment. He could not speak for a few moments as he had intended to speak, and she sat beside him while he drove, commenting lightly upon the improvements the city was making in this squalid neighbourhood of ill repute. He hardly heard what she said; he only knew that the little discourse did not call for pertinent response; and meanwhile he was examining and analyzing his own sensations, criticizing, testing, keenly scrutinizing them to detect weaknesses due perhaps to his own inability to judge in a matter so vitally close to his heart. When he did turn to her — she felt the change in him and was on guard to meet it — he spoke, not as he would have spoken to the nurse who welcomed Limpety Jim at the head of the stairs, but yet not as he had hitherto spoken to his friend's wife.

“Do you remember talking to me of Miss Thorley?” he asked, and without waiting for her answer continued, “It was in your old home where her childish presence seemed to linger in a way that moved you. It moved me, too, for — I love her. Oh, yes, it's true,” he added as, with a fluttering

negative motion of her hands she sought to arrest his confidence. "And I thought — I think you knew it, or you could n't have let me share your memories that night."

She did not answer, nor did he seem to expect her to; he had so much to say and dared say so little. Stirred to the depths of his nature by the one passionate affection he had known in his life, he could speak only in brief, charged sentences which struck her with painful significance.

"It is evident that my feeling for her was plain," he added. "What — what I would give my life almost to know is how did she — how does she feel toward me."

Though indirect, it was a question; but she could not have spoken now, though silence might be construed into dumb confession.

"One night," he went on tensely, "she seemed to care. The next, I heard she was gone. Yet she had promised to see me the following day, and she must have known what I would have asked. . . . I thought it was all done. Perhaps it is, and this, that has bewildered me to-day, is only a mad flaring-up of the sweet hope I believed I'd extinguished forever. But — if it is n't done — if it is n't done," — he ground out the words now with a panting relentlessness that agitated her terribly — "then you must think of me as a man who has fought all his life for an end that never could, even if won, affect his personal happiness; and then — then measure what I would do to win this — this one thing on earth!"

"But — but if she is married —" She stumbled over the words.

He hardly noted the interruption; his thought seemed so close to hers that he was but continuing it, it seemed, when he spoke again. "If she is actually a wife," he said deliberately,

“if she is a happy woman, living a woman’s full life with the man she loves then — then ——” his voice fell; it grew old and wearied — “then I am merely a fanciful old fool.”

A silence fell between them. She sat with her hands clasped, not daring to look at him, and his eyes were fixed on the road ahead. They were crossing the park now, and it was not till they had sped through the entrance and out into the avenue that he spoke again; but he seemed to have left behind the doubt that had beset him.

“There are women, *you* know,” he began, “who are capable of the extremes of self-sacrifice. She is one of these. If — if some social blight were to fall upon womanhood, and all its graces were to perish and the pattern of femininity be lost, if Therese Thorley were spared, they could be divined and reconstructed just from the sound of her voice and the touch of her hand. I — I always knew,” he said slowly, it was such effort to speak calmly, “what wealth of affection, what depth of feeling, there is in her. If I thought I had stirred that even in the faintest degree, I could tear up the world by the roots if by that I should get nearer to her and make her, in time, care for me!”

“Oh, please, please!” she cried.

But he would not listen now. “Wait, wait — I’m nearly through,” he interrupted, “and I must say the rest. Listen! If my love, the woman I love, is sacrificing herself for another woman, she is sacrificing me, too, and she shall not — she shall not do that. I’m not bound to respect her right to deprive me of the opportunity to show my devotion, to make her love me if I can. Do you think I care what becomes of any other man or woman on earth, of all the men and women in the world, if I can do that — if I can gain her love?”

"But if — if it's impossible?" she faltered, shaken so she could scarcely utter the words.

He straightened and stiffened. "I'll not believe that till I have to. It is n't in me to believe that without trying harder, without having had my chance. I'm going to Sicily to-morrow on this business; when I come back it will be on my own. I want a promise from you ——"

"No — no!" she cried. "You must n't — you must n't exact ——"

"I want you," he continued steadily, "to promise me that no — no change shall come in my absence that could disadvantage me. I want you to promise me I shall lose nothing by going."

She was silent; a whirl of emotions had been let loose in her, against which she battled with a desperate conviction that she must master herself or lose all she had fought for. They were close to the house now; she had but a few minutes more.

"If you can't do that," he said sternly, "something in me will force me to tell Michael Thwaites what I think of him."

"What — you think of him!" she exclaimed; she could hardly credit her senses.

"What any honourable man must think of him!" he repeated, and yet he hesitated, taken aback by the genuine surprise in her voice. The absolute ingenuousness with which she had met him made her amazement all the more significant. Bewilderment crowded upon him; he felt the ground slipping from under him.

As for her, she was stunned by the revelation in his words; the intimation that Michael and she were partners in the substitution of her personality for her sister's shocked and hurt her. And yet, gradually, it comforted her, for if his friend believed Michael to be part author of the deception, it

surely would not be friendship's obligation to reveal what was supposedly already known. So narrowed had the circle of her desires become that it held room for only one; to protect that one was all the prayer her tumultuously beating heart could ask for — just postponement of disaster till shipwreck of half his life's cargo of hopes should not mean loss of the whole! And in bringing that half cargo to port — the thought came to her quick and warm with reassurance — Johns was as deeply interested as herself, as Michael himself. For this reason she might count upon his concurrence in that vitally necessary postponement. Afterward — but there would be no afterward; she could see nothing beyond the grim shock of anger and disgust in Michael's face when she should reveal to him the fraudulent part she had played and caused him to play.

In the fact that Johns's departure was imminent, she saw her reprieve, and this was all she craved. She had learned to take short views, as one must who gambles with fate and the stakes are high; and in the reaction of relief she experienced a buoyant sense of victory now that enabled her to turn to her companion, and say to him lightly as the car stopped in front of the house: "We 've got rather mixed, have n't we? Won't you come in and get it all straightened out?"

He did not answer, but stood to hand her out, while she lifted her veil and faced him with a smiling composure quite unaffected. He looked appealingly, searchingly into her uplifted eyes that sparkled with excitement behind their thick lashes, like the live waters of a mountain brook through curtaining rushes. His own were hollow and miserable, and their suffering went to her heart. She put out a hand saying softly, "Come in, do — please, because I want you."

He shook his head, and yet he stood a moment as though

he could not bear to leave her. But by this, Michael, who had seen them coming, was at the door adding his invitation.

"Yes, do — please," she urged again. And he followed her up the stairs where Michael was waiting to meet them. It seemed to Archibald Johns that, in the commonplaces of their greeting, he was relinquishing his right to dream a dear dream, fantastic, but incredibly, potently sweet.

CHAPTER XX

DREAMS were absurdly out of place in the Thwaites house that evening. Preoccupied and troubled as he was, Johns could not but recognize this, for workmen were constructing a covered way from the door to the street, along which a broad strip of velvet carpet rolled; and within, the floors were canvassed, while all the lower part of the house, having been stripped of furnishings, was ablaze with light and sweet with the perfume of flowers, which banked even the staircase, up which his hostess quickly disappeared.

"What is it all about? What in the world——" began Johns.

"It's the ball, man," answered Michael smiling grimly, "*your* ball, Archibald Johns's ball, which the unhappy Thwaiteses are giving. What!" he exclaimed at his friend's bewildered face, "you don't mean to say you've forgotten all about it, after literally driving us into it?"

"Oh!" Johns looked about him appalled at the preparations for festivity. "Good Lord, I had forgotten!"

"And Mrs. Thwaites captured you by strategy?" asked Michael laughing.

Johns did not answer. He stood a moment longer, as the maids and men flew busily in and out, looking about him. It was good for fanciful old fools, he said to himself, to have the cobwebs of unreality swept so clean; to have the hard conventions of civilization for a touchstone of fact; to be meshed in a multitude of vivid, trivial details that go to make up actual life.

He remembered about this ball, of course, though it seemed years, not weeks, since he could have cared enough to urge upon his friend the effectiveness, from a political standpoint, of some such function. He did not add, what he himself knew to be his main reason for advising it: that it would put an end to certain rumours regarding the candidate's domestic affairs which could not fail to injure him. He remembered now the reluctance with which his friend's wife had finally acceded, and his wonder at the time that Beatrix Thwaites should have to be besought to open her doors to gayety. But he did not for a moment permit himself to dwell on this; he had done with his dream. In this atmosphere, so soon to be breathed by Mrs. Grundy, it was too whimsically absurd. And if that dream were false, why then he was false to his friend, for he loved the woman that friend called wife. A second time — however little he was to her in either rôle — she had endeared herself to him. He realized now what had made this last campaign unlike all the many he had doggedly waged; he felt, now that he could no longer claim it, what stimulus it had been to be able to bring results and lay them at her feet.

"I must get away," he said at length. "Where can we have a few minutes' talk?"

But Michael would not hear of his going; they were to have only a simple, quiet dinner, he said, in the little breakfast-room, since the dining room was in the hands of the decorators. No guest would be there other than Johns himself, and his hostess would excuse the informality of his dress. In fact she must certainly have hoped and intended just this; otherwise why had she brought him home with her? Johns could not meet and lightly dispose of the question. He was achingly conscious of the folly of dreaming late in life,

when dreaming-time is inevitably past. All he had got, in exchange for the resigned, grim peace he had conquered for himself, was this new smarting sense of loss, and an anticipation, unreasoning but instinctive, of greater loss to come. But there was much to discuss and decide, since he was sailing in the morning; there were arrangements to make and many letters to write, so he found himself sitting at table, hurriedly explaining to Michael his hopes and plans in connection with the finding of Brocato (throwing himself into the current of the stream of affairs that it might bear him away from his own thoughts) when his hostess, who was late to dinner, came in.

He was facing the door, to which Michael's back was turned, but Johns saw her coming toward them through the long dining-room. The busy caterers looked up from the tables as she passed, and from the ladders the decorators gazed down upon her with artistic recognition of the completeness with which her figure crowned the whole effect. But to Johns it seemed that he alone saw her beauty full-panoplied in gold-flowered net, her bare arms and throat gleaming with diamond-studded chains of topaz, her fine-spun hair set with a coronet which held a tiger lily done in gems, and her small, alert, glowing face coquettishly conscious of its own loveliness. She looked a tiny, warm Diana, and as she moved the lights caught the play of iridescent golden thread which spun the outline of her light young body.

"Just the same," came Michael's voice, commenting upon his wife's share in the tracing of Brocato, "I wish Mrs. Thwaites had had no hand in it. It sounds ungrateful, but you heard me ask her not to."

"And you saw me," put in a soft, mischievous voice behind him, "pay not the slightest attention to what he said."

"Beatrix!" Michael turned sharply; it was so exasperatingly reminiscent, that mocking insouciance.

She bowed before him in her slender grace, a picturesquely gleaming parody of repentance. He looked upon her shining beauty, remembered how many weary months had passed since he had beheld her all a-glow like this, and his dark face softened. And Johns, watching the little comedy, sardonically demanded of his dreaming self what could be more characteristic of American conjugality.

"My lord," said the lady airily to her guest, "is graciously pleased to forgive his disobedient spouse because her dress is pretty." She made a little grimace at Thwaites and, seating herself, unfolded her napkin. "But he need n't fear that she 'll ever do it again," she added as she sipped her soup. "She won't. She 's had enough of that sort of thing. The importance of being frivolous engrosses her to-night. Oh, won't I dance!"

Johns, wondering as he watched her, asked himself whether her pose was donned to cure himself of dreaming dreams or to irritate her husband; or whether, after all, it might not be returning health and the subtle influence of her golden frock and the dance-music, strains of which came to them as the musicians tuned up their instruments, that made her so like the Beatrix Thwaites of last winter. He was sure it was the last when, half an hour later, young Willaby arrived, and hastily excusing herself, she left the table to discuss with him certain important details.

"He 's a dear boy," she said, smiling gaily up at the young man, as she gave him her hand, "who 's come early, to help me out. It 's so long, Bert Willaby, since I 've given a dance or been to one, I 've forgotten everything — the names of my guests, how to dance —

all of it. You 're to take care that I remember. Understand?"

They heard her gay, excited voice below in the reception room, explaining her arrangements, and the young man's business-like suggestions and amendments. Their own discourse seemed to Johns no more seriously undertaken than the little parleys that came to them, now and then, apropos of the time for proper distributions of favours and the order of dances. But when they drank their coffee and started to go upstairs to the secretary's room, where he was waiting to write Johns's letters, everything on the first floor was apparently happily decided; for from the hall below came the billowing strains of the new waltz and a single couple was dancing delightedly to it.

At the head of the staircase Johns turned to look down on them; she waved a joyous hand to them as her partner swept her on into an adjoining room, and in the light of that graceful frivolity, Johns's dreams seemed to have been dreamed hundreds of years ago, by the most fanciful of old fools, beguiled by a perfect coquette.

Michael looked, too, and frowned as he looked, and smiled when her laugh came peeling up to them, and frowned again; and then he resolutely turned his back and showed his friend the way to their improvised office. There the two worked for half an hour before Michael was summoned below to play host.

Fortunately, their older friends came earliest; but these soon gave place to the multitude of acquaintances. It was irksome to Michael, this interchange of civilities, with people he barely knew or did not know at all. And as they stood together welcoming their guests, occasionally it seemed to him that his wife shared his perplexity. But young Willaby, who

kept his place behind her, was the readiest of social major-domos, supplying a name when she hesitated, or with a low word aptly classifying and relating the strangers, all in a high-spirited, bombastic, whispered facetiousness that she seconded admirably.

She sent Michael away finally, telling him he had behaved nicely and should be rewarded. For her part, she said, she was going to dance away the boredom of standing still so long and for all the days she had not danced and might not dance again. And with a smile to Willaby they joined the swaying couples that beat physical time to the music's rhythm.

Johns was right; this woman in her beautiful frock, riding upon the music's pulse, the rhythm of her body timed to the elastic step of a partner whose skill was perfection, was an incarnation of Beatrix Thwaites. But she was a Beatrix who had been deprived for months of the lighter things of life, gaiety and movement and the companionship of light-hearted youth. And she was a Beatrix upon whom sentence had been passed — by herself. She had only a short time before her, but she had this one night to be young in, to ignore the future and forget the past, and joy this once in her beauty and youth, in the gay contagion of numbers and the exquisite madness of irresponsibility.

So she danced, as Beatrix Thwaites used to dance, with a harmony of grace and a face alight with pleasure, with an eager delight in motion and a Bacchantic crescendo of enjoyment. Among the partners who crowded about her she distributed segments of waltzes and two-steps, making reward of a round with her conditional upon the rest of the dance's being given to some neglected guest her hostess's eye singled out. Michael saw her within the compass of one number, as Burke's partner, as Morse's, as Willis's, as young

Wilmerding's, and another youth's whose name he had forgotten.

She drew his eyes; he could not keep them from her. Where she was, he found himself turning and watching till she passed beyond his sight, and he knew when she came back again. Through all the trivial obligations of the evening he felt her presence; he played his part of host as best he could, but he played it in a world of shadows. He was back again at the beginning, he said to himself; he had re-entered that magical country where only two live, and where nothing is impossible except that they should not live for each other.

When a message from Johns was brought to him that he had completed his work and was taking his leave, Michael knew just where to find her. He made his way to where she balanced on Willaby's arm, and at his approach the young man stopped and waited.

"I want you — just a minute — please," Michael murmured. And he added, "Johns is going."

She stood a moment looking at him. She hardly knew what the words were he said to her, but she felt the call in his voice, in his eyes, that seemed to take possession of her and make it rapture to yield. She put out her hand and Michael took her in his arms, and they danced across the two rooms that separated them from the hall. It was only a few moments, but, as he held her warm, lithe body close, as he listened to her quick breathing and looked down upon the delicately flushed face with its parted lips and shining eyes, he felt again that same magical sense of youth which had transfigured life for him one evening in Vienna nearly three years ago.

To Johns, too, standing at the outer door watching them dance toward him, there came a sudden realization of the tender miracle wrought for these two. "I am sorry you

MICHAEL THWAITES'S WIFE

thought it necessary to interrupt your fun," he said gravely. "I asked Brett to say good-bye for me without disturbing you."

"But you see," Michael's voice rang with rare joyousness. "I had previously told him that he should bind your hand and foot, if that was necessary to prevent your getting away without our seeing you." His hand was still upon her supple waist and, as he spoke the last few words, he drew her toward him.

But she slipped away. A sudden crushing consciousness of reality had fallen upon her as she met John's eyes. "I don't want you to see me as I am," she said to herself, and a trembling terror of his judgment came to her. She looked up at him with timid respect, with pity and affection. "Good-bye," she said plaintively, taking his hand in both of hers. "Please come back to us soon; we will need you so — both of us."

"I'm coming," he said steadily. "Good-bye." Sooner than she thought of what she felt, he shared; some comprehension of her appeal.

"And take care of yourself, old man," said Michael with a cordial pressure of his friend's hand. "You look fagged; you've worked too hard. It's well this thing's compelling you to rest. Sea air will tone you up."

"Yes, I think I need to get away," John responded. "Good luck to you! Things will be pretty near decided the time I get back, but there's work for you between now and then; I'm glad to leave you looking so fit."

The colour burned under Michael's dark skin. "Well, I've been dancing, John," he cried, "for the first time in years. We — we're both a bit mad to-night."

But when the door had closed behind his friend and he turned eagerly, thinking his wife stood beside him, he

her hurrying back to the crowded rooms; the light seemed quenched in her eyes, her face was pale, all animation and colour were gone from it.

"Oh, wait — wait, Trix," he called.

She hesitated, looking back at him with watchful, unsmiling eyes.

But the blood was pounding at his temples, and an almost suffocating sense of joyous oneness with her filled him. He caught her hand. "What is it — what is it, Gold-Trix?" he asked below his breath.

"I must go back," she murmured, struggling to release herself. "We must go back."

"But not back so far," he said tensely, "as your dancing with other men. Never again that far back; I can't stand — I won't. . . . Sweetheart!" And in the shadow of the Venetian leather hangings, he bent and pressed his lips to her arm.

She broke from him with a low cry, but he kept close beside her. "Trix," he whispered, "I'm mad for you — mad as I was that night on the ship when I caught you and carried you up, up into the magic moonlight! Remember — remember?"

But she was terrified into self-mastery now. "I've forgotten," she said coldly, falling back upon the formula that had so often helped her.

"It's a lie!" He spoke under his breath, but she marvelled that every ear even in the furthest room had not heard it, for its passion rang like a cry within her. "Women don't forget such things — such things are not forgotten!" he repeated furiously. "You need n't lie to make your meaning clear. I've been slow, but I understand — finally." And he held the draperies aside for her to re-enter the ball-room.

She did not dance again; it seemed to her she should never dance again, nor be light-hearted, nor smile, except with this perfunctory semblance of gaiety with which she now met her guests. She was old with unhappiness and dispirited knowledge of life; her heart was wrung within her and she had no hope. She looked back upon the time when life had been simple and sanely happy, and the future, whatever shape it might take, must still be sweet with endeavour, it had seemed to her, and full of activity and accomplishment. But now there was nothing on earth that she cared to do, nothing more in life she cared to know. Her bright, eager, loving inquisitiveness had been stripped from her, the world was bare and sodden and miserable. There was no future for her; the present terrified her, and the past, her contented, distant, girlish past she had thrown away. What was she to do with the years to come?

Michael found her, after the last guest had gone, standing looking out into the street. She could see nothing, he knew, for the flower-softened lights were still blazing, and without there was the moonless dusk of the early autumn morning. She turned when he spoke her name and her wan-faced misery hurt him inexpressibly.

"You look so tired," he said.

"Yes, I'm tired." Her voice was that of an old woman, patient, monotonously low and lacking resonance.

"You must let me ask you to pardon me," he said slowly. "I'm ashamed to have spoken as I did."

She bowed her head deprecatingly.

"What a pity," he murmured, "that we can't be friends. I will try — for the future. Good-night."

She did not answer; she could not trust herself to speak. She stood looking after him, such an intensity of longing in

her that, had he turned, she would have fallen at his feet and sobbed out her love and the shame of it. But he did not turn, and at the door a yawning servant met him and handed him a letter. Idly she watched him tear it open. A heavy, dull inertia held her; she was very cold and so tired that she could long only for physical relief.

He came back to her, the open letter in his hand. "I beg your pardon," he said with a frown, "this letter is marked 'personal and immediate,' so Brett left word it should be given me as soon as possible. I — my eyes are wretched to-night, and the writer — it's a woman evidently — writes such a scrawl. . . . Do you mind reading it to me?"

She took it and turned to the signature on the last page. "It's from Daisy Varney, Countess Thuri," she said looking inquiringly up at him. "From Italy — do you mind my reading it?"

"Mind?" he repeated sharply.

"All right then," she said and, glancing over the closely-written pages in her hand, she moved toward a lamp-lit table. But she did not reach it. Suddenly she turned toward him wavering and, with a thin cry of "Dead — both of them! Both — dead!" before he could get to her she fell full length.



CHAPTER XXI

THE cliffs are high at Amalfi, high and precipitous of a dazzling whiteness under the fierce rays of southern sun. At their feet "the matchless bay" shines sparkles, a rainbowed ribbon outlining the curving shore binding its gold and silver sands. On the steep, sheer heights grow vines and vines and vines, old as the human thirst for ideality, tenacious seemingly of their precarious footholds adding their glory of green to the warm picturesqueness of the land, arched over by a sky as deeply blue as the water or paling, like it under a shimmering heat that seems to tinge the very mountains to the same hue, a pearly, pale iridescence, a no-colour that swims with fused play of every shade; though Earth, voluptuously faint, waited breathless for the mounting passion of the Sun.

Is it seven hundred years, or more, since some dead artist or a Capuchin chose the site for the monastery here? How well they builded, those old monks, and how many quarters of centuries they had to complete and perfect their project since, though a poet-eyed founder must die, his order lived immortal! And so through the long days and months and years and generations the peasants toiled to cut out of the white cliffs the great, wide, winding, mounting stone approach with its occasional steps; to bulwark the beautiful, boundless vines; to hew white pillars of stone for the loveliest pergolas in all the world, vine-hung, nature-frescoed with the purple blue of grape clusters, broad, cool, winding amply about

mountain side and looking sheer into turquoise watery depths; to build and beautify the chapel; to haul the organs up this mighty hill — how many hundred feet above the bay?

But after all was done, the world revolved and turned and turned away from monastic ideals. The age for Savonarolas and Torquemadas and Fra Angelicos passed; and yet to-day, could some old Capuchin return from Paradise (one would not wonder if he did, it is so lovely at Amalfi) and step from his tiny stone cell to stand a moment on his tiny stone balcony, or sit upon the rude-hewn stone benches cut therein, I think he 'd recognize the everlasting beauty of the perfect view spread out far, far below his sandaled feet. Within he might not look, for the convent is the Hotel of the Capuchins now, and restless modern folk from all the nations of this restless modern world, craving a bit of the peace the old monks left here behind them, climb the great hill to rest awhile, high above the town, and soothe their fevered spirits with the balm of its beauty.

Two of these arrived in the warm dusk late one afternoon. They had driven for days along the wonderful white road that hardly has its peer in all the world, skirting the exquisite curves of that bay which Nature modelled with the care she sometimes bestows on a girl's chin and throat and lips. They had passed through squalid, lovely villages with their fruit of squalid, lovely children, and through chestnut groves and olives and orchards of those figs whose heart is a drop of nectar, and vineyards where the grapes are brown-gold, dusty with warm gold as the heavy-freighted bees are with pollen, and hanging in great, sunned amber clusters at one's hand.

And yet, though these two arrived at sunset, they descended that long steep way again after they had dined out in the

pergola. For the air was warm and sweet and the water was molten silver beneath the moon, and they were young and — old Giosue, the porter who kept the gate below, saw that soon — were newly bound together. They stayed out upon the bay, plashing softly about in the spacious silvery mystery, long after all other travellers had put out their lights, long after the town below had gone to sleep. Occasionally the girl's light laughter trilled to shore; Giosue said it was like nothing so much as the wavering silver wake, made vocal, from their oars dripping jewels to a jewelled sea. And often the man sang; not as Northerners usually sing (Giosue had heard Mario and many lesser Marios who followed him) but with an open-throated thrilling zest for life that Cisalpine impresarios seek and find beyond the great smoke-choked tunnels the nations bored to get to Italy.

What time it was they rapped for entrance at the lower gate, Giosue could not say. He knew the amount of the *mancia*, for with no petty *soldi* did this young foreigner recompense a man he 'd roused from sleep, but with silver, five good *lira*. And the little lady, smiling upon him, actually wished him good-evening (though truly it must have been near dawn) with the little song from Figaro; 't was all the Italian she knew evidently; but, oh, though she had not much voice for singing, she was enchantingly gracious and smiling and young and of that sunny, fair white beauty that makes an Italian's eye light up and his cap come off in quick homage.

This was all Giosue knew, he said, and added reluctantly that he did peep out of his little, dark-curtained window after them — they were so young and gay and beautiful, the two — and he saw the broad-shouldered husband (for all the world was safe asleep) swing his wife — she was a little, a tiny thing — clear up on his shoulder, not as one carries a woman,

but like a child; and in the still white moonlight growing faint — no soul was there to see — they disappeared up the long, gradual incline singing pianissimo together. But he had not seen them come down again; of this Giosue was positive. The lower gate may easily be opened from the inside, the management has no reason for preventing egress; it is to keep those other than hotel guests out that it has Giosue stationed at the lower gate. No, he did not see them come down; he never, in fact, saw them again.

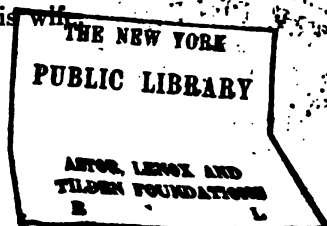
But the clerk of the ill-fated little Hotel Santa Caterina, who escaped, was positive it was the same couple that asked for rooms very, very late the night before. None of the survivors remembered having seen them after that. They had registered at the Capuchins, the gentleman said, but had decided they preferred the more accessible hotel. What reason they had for the change at that hour of night, they did not give to him; but the clerk, who understood some English, overheard a reference which made him believe they wished to avoid some other travellers whose name they had discovered on the Capuchins's register.

The name they had registered, though (it was found later) told nothing to their unwelcome acquaintances — whichever of the hotel's guests they may have been; this was one reason why, at the Capuchins, they believed the name to be assumed. Another reason was that, though these two were clearly of the leisure class, though their style of travelling and their effects were those of people of wealth and culture, and though their names had been published widely in the list of those who perished when the land slipped that time, and the little Hotel Santa Caterina, with its guests, slid down from the precipitous cliff where it had perched safely so many years, down into the waters

of the bay with a deafening, clattering after-torrent of stones and earth, tons upon tons, to bury it deeper — no word of inquiry had ever been received about them.

Not till the Countess Maximilian Thuri cried out at an amateur photograph she found in a long-unopened book of the Hotel Capuchins (the Count Max spent his time in the village, and his lady, bored and idle, took refuge in the cool old library) had there been the slightest hope of identifying the young pair. But in this snap-shot the head-waiter had slyly taken (they were such a pretty, glad couple, he explained apologetically) the Countess recognized friends, friends she was curiously excited about and interested in. Her inquiries (she had searched the hotel register in vain) and the photograph stirred up the memory the unfortunate travellers had left behind, and soon she knew the pitiful story. She identified the initials on the man's toilet articles in the officials' possession, though the name on his bills and papers was strange to her; the woman's effects were unmarked. The Countess herself had questioned old Giosue and received from the authorities all possible assistance in her search. The bodies had been buried, of course. The man's, old Giosue recognized and identified in spite of its condition and the fact that days elapsed before it was recovered, for the old porter said it was a head to be remembered, as one remembers that of the Antinous of the Vatican. The woman's body was crushed beyond recognition.

This was what the Countess Thuri had written; as delicately as might be, more briefly and yet as fully as possible she had set down the facts and sent them to Doctor Thwaites that he might break the news to his wife.



Her letter, together with copies of official documents enclosed and the eloquent little out-door photograph, were in Tessy's hands when she waked from the nothingness into which the shock had plunged her. And after days had passed she had them still on the table beside her bed; for though she had gone over them again and again till she knew the pathetic little recital almost word for word, she continually re-read them in her anguished search for further information. And always it was incredible to her that so vital a part of herself had quit the world in which she herself remained unconscious of her loss.

"When we were separated once," she said to Michael, who sat beside her bed, "and I got sick with fever, she wrote me a note in which she said, 'I'm down with fever; you must be, too.' And when she took some childish ailment and the doctor wanted to separate us for fear I should catch it, old Mammy Prynne laughed at him. 'T will do you no good,' she said; 'they have twin sicknesses.' And so we had. How we must have grown apart for me not to feel her agony! Something's come between us, I — I think. Yes, it must be. You see," she added with a quivering lip, though her eyes were dry, "we were not ordinary twins, Michael, but something nearer than that; not two that had only chanced together, but two who had been one before they were two."

"Yes — yes," he said, to quiet her. Her fall had caused a slight injury which made it necessary for her to lie still. But so cruel had been the blow that struck her down, it seemed to him that, even apart from this, she could not have moved. "But are n't you talking too much?" he questioned gravely. "Can't you rest?"

She shook her head irritably. "It's no greater strain to talk than to keep thinking and thinking."

He put his hand over hers; it was hot and dry. "Then try to think, dear, more wisely."

"Wisely?"

He met her look and nodded with pitying significance as he answered, "Resignedly."

She drew her hand away. "I can't," she said. "It is n't true. She can't be gone. I'd feel it — I'd know it."

He sighed. "Then be reasonable and, believing that to be so, accept the hope you have and try to rest."

She shook her head, rolled it wearily back and forth on its pillow. "I can't," she said again. "I can't do that, either. I can only lie here and wait. It seems to me I'll never rest or sleep again."

The nerve-strained tonelessness of her voice alarmed him. "You must not say such things, and you must compel yourself not to think them," he said peremptorily.

She smiled faintly, ironically. "If I could hear it was n't true, I think I could close my eyes and sleep myself dead for sheer happiness."

"Trix!" he exclaimed angrily, despairingly.

She looked up at him. "Don't call me that. I'm not ——" she began, and then indifferently let weakness overcome her. There would be time enough to tell him. There was so little to tell now, and she had so little strength and it all mattered so little.

"Are you going to lie there like that and put up absolutely no fight?" he demanded, racked by pity for her.

She looked up wearily. "Are you trying to bully me to sleep?" she asked.

He smiled, but there was no change in her wan face.

"I am going to see that you do sleep," he said determinedly.

"I can't," she repeated. "I can't even cry. I can't go on living, I think."

He looked down upon her. She seemed fading away under his eyes; he knew no more narcotics should be given her; he knew she had barely touched unconsciousness, had had no relief from suffering since the receipt of the letter. Night after night he had stolen into her room to find her, after a short, unrestful, drugged sleep, lying with wide-open, tearless eyes looking straight ahead and seeing always, as she told him when the nurse left them together, "the radiant loveliness of the bay at Amalfi, the cliffs, the vines, the horrible beauty of Italy down there where Nature, the foul-souled witch, heaps beauty upon herself to hide her hellish purpose, and lure poor fools to destruction. The beast! She — she just shrugged her shoulder and their lives went out! Do you suppose she turned her head to see what became of them? She did n't even know. And that — that horrible unconsciousness of hers makes it all the more bestial. For what does she care for life or death? She's queen of both — the beast!"

He heard her, amazed, terrified. "Hush — hush!" he said.

"Do you know," she went on as though he had not spoken, "she's come to be a real entity to me as I lie here through the nights. Sometimes she looks to me like that many-breasted, bestially beautiful Ephesian Diana in the Naples gallery. But oftener she's just — just brute force — as she seems down there in that hell of hers, that very revelation of her cruel, blasting, treacherous heart laid bare in Vesuvius's crater, threatening, diabolical, triumphant;

a horrible She, chuckling to herself as she prepares and plots some new horror." She was shivering as she spoke, though unconscious of it, an uncontrollable physical shuddering that shook her light body from head to feet.

"Don't be a coward," he commanded sternly. "Get a grip on yourself."

"A coward?" she repeated wide-eyed. "What else can one be with that sickeningly monstrous, red-fanged Cruelty that's queen of the world gloating over one? Ah — how I hate — hate her! She's unmasked for me — the tigress. There's not a flower but is nourished on cruelty; there's not a tree that does n't hide unspeakable things; there's not a brook, nor a wave, nor a sunset, nor a child's smile but I can see behind it that bloodthirsty, insatiable ravening beast, who devours her children that she may give birth to them again, that they may again furnish food for her — ugh!"

He laid his hand compellingly upon her; she was shuddering as with a cold nausea. But she took it and pressed it a moment. "Go back to bed," she said presently.

"Won't you go to sleep?" he begged despairingly.

She shook her head. "My hate's too strong to let me sleep. But it's too strong to let me die; that would please her. I'll get well," she added hopelessly.

He wondered to himself if she would. He was shaken by her long vigil, by her suffering; and the instances she had given of intimate constitutional resemblance grew to have threatening significance. The sisters had kept time like two watches, hardly to be thrown out of accord except by some physical jar. Could it be that the very life of one was dependent upon the other's? Impossible, he cried, and, turning to her, reminded her that a week before the

tragedy had been long past, and yet she had danced like a thing of fire and life. Distract, she nodded and fell silent; only to break out again in quivering wrath against the terrible personality whose presence she saw manifested so frightfully upon that beautiful, far-away shore.

"The devil is female, Michael," she went on bitterly. "And her name is Nature — 'sweet, smiling Nature, gentle Mother Earth!' . . . Think of the centuries of slaughter over there about the bay of Naples! Pompeii and Ischia and Bosco Tre Caze. And Dick — beautiful Dick! God, how could she kill him! But, of course, she could — she, the ultimate executioner of us all. . . . Have you ever thought, Michael, how right is the instinct that makes savages endow their gods with brutal attributes and celebrate their awful rites with blood?"

He was aching with compassion for her; so frail she had become she seemed a wrathful, resenting spirit with but strength enough to blaspheme. He had chosen to be silent, for comment only added fuel to the cruel rage consuming her. And his judgment was wise, for presently she looked scrutinizingly at him and forgot herself.

"How tired — how dead tired you look!" she exclaimed pitifully. "I am taking the life out of you. And you're working so hard, too. Terrible!"

He grasped eagerly at this, her first expression of cognizance of his suffering; in all these low-pitched monotonous that exhausted her she had spoken only of the dead, of herself, and "that embodied murder, Nature."

"I *am* tired," he said slowly. "And to-morrow there are four meetings for me to address. It's exhausting work. I wish it were all over."

She nodded. "Won't you go and lie down?" she begged.

"I will try not to think. There is no more to think. I have said it all. I am relieved — like Vesuvius after she has blasted the earth and made a new graveyard. . . . Oh, forgive me, Michael!" she cried in sudden contrition. "Do you think I will go mad? . . . I was n't before, that other time when you thought I was. I'll tell you all about it soon. I would now, but — but I'm so terribly tired. Would n't it be a horrible mania to have — this thing I keep thinking? Do you think I will — do you?"

"No!" He spoke sharply; his nerves were on edge with the long-drawn-out misery from which his love had vainly sought to rescue her. "No, you're going to sleep — do you hear? You're going to sleep. You shall sleep to-night. I swear you shall!"

"Oh!" She looked up almost hopefully. "I — I wish you could hypnotize me into believing it. But I can't yield, even though I want to."

"Oh, yes, you can. You shall. I'll see that you do," he said in desperation.

"I — I think," she said hesitatingly, "I almost might if I could move a bit. But they won't let me be moved, you know, because I've hurt myself — that night in falling. The little changes Miss Winchell makes make no difference. I — loathe the bed. If I could sleep up — up from it, I think I could. . . . Oh, how cruel I am to you, Michael!" she cried and wrung her hands.

But he fell on his knees before the low bed and, thrusting his arms beneath her, he lifted the light body and held it outstretched.

"No — no," she protested feebly. "You can't. It is n't fair. I can't —"

But he would not listen. "I shall stay here and hold

you whether you sleep or not. I shall hold you till you sleep," he said, and the determination in his voice overpowered her. "Try, then — if you really care."

She looked up at him appealingly. But he averted his eyes. She closed hers despondingly; she read in the lines in his face how futile opposition was, and her woman's second thought was that she might sham sleep. But he was not to be deceived and, though she did not know his strength and her body stiffened that she might not strain it, she was glad her attempt had failed, as women are at every manifestation of the stronger soul.

The moments passed, yet he did not speak or move. Though she opened her eyes with an unspoken apology for her pretense and a promise, like a contrite child, he did not meet them. Her glance flitted from his set face to his bowed shoulders. He would — she said to herself, almost weeping with rage at herself and pity for him — he would kneel like that and hold her from the bed that seemed to have grown horribly part of her, as though her body sunken into it might never be detached; his strength would uphold her till he had had his way.

Oh, if she could but sleep and release him!

She sighed and closed her eyes again, and with all the strength left to her she willed to sleep. The obsession of that tremendous force for evil that her brain had personified came upon her; but she evaded it. She would battle to-morrow, when hate would be as strong; to-morrow when such battling would not mean cruelty to the living bed that upheld her — a cruelty that made her kin to the thing she abhorred.

And so, though she had not conquered it, she felt this once she had eluded it. A truce it was; just — just a

blessed truce during which nothing happens; a truce, indeterminate, vague — bodiless — empty of form or happening — a mere . . .

She started and her fingers spread apart as though to clutch at safety. And then she felt the tense, responsive muscles upholding her, lift her body just a trifle higher; and in every aching nerve she recognized that strength, and all her soul went out to it in gratitude and love. And presently her limbs relaxed and Michael held his breath. And after a time she gave a quick, terrified start again, and then she slept.

To the man who knelt, the light burden borne across his arms, she seemed a creature about to be sacrificed whom Infinite Mercy has spared. He himself was almost spent with watching, with battling for this one who was so dear to him. But he knew, as he held her on outstretched arms — as though calling divine pity to witness her weakness, her youth, her loveliness — that he had never loved her till then, so moved with welling tenderness was his heart, so profoundly grateful was his soul.

The nurse, stealing in, looked for a moment uncomprehending. But she understood the wordless dismissal in Michael's eye and, after piling up the pillows beneath her patient's head, she noiselessly left the room.

And Michael knelt and listened to the music of that light, rhythmic breathing. To his body's revolt, as the minutes passed, he opposed the jubilant determination of his soul a-cry with the masterful delight of conquering, of serving, of being conquered by weakness more completely than ever by the power of beauty. In time the numbness of his muscles made his burden seem so light he had to bend his gaze upon it to reassure himself; and with the tingling

agony that reawakened sentience brought, he could have cried out with pain and fear lest, after all, his muscles might refuse to obey. But he set his teeth till it passed and, looking down upon the relaxed little figure, so appealingly helpless in its fragility and grace, a tear fell on his cheek of pity and love and happiness.

When she opened hazy eyes at length — his lined face was infinitely tender as he watched the gentle awakening — she smiled to see him bending over her. And then with fuller consciousness came remembrance of the tragedy; her lids fell and her lips writhed with pain.

“Try to sleep again,” he murmured, “dear heart — my dear!”

She looked up quickly, penitently. “You’ve been holding me all this time! Oh!” she sighed pityingly. “How long is it? Oh, put me down!”

As well as he could, he obeyed. The strain upon his muscles had so stiffened them that they barely did his bidding. A quick realization of it all came to her then, flooding her being with exquisite consciousness of his devotion; of what was still left to her, however ruthless the destroyer.

As he swayed a bit on his knees in his effort to rise, she lifted her arms and drew his head down to her breast. “Dear,” she sobbed; “oh, my beloved!”

CHAPTER XXII

BEING a boss is a career of action; it presents small opportunity for introspection. Yet the very position attained by such activity provokes criticism and entails defense and explanation of oneself. That explanation, had it been frankly and consecutively voiced, might have been worded, with a bull-like sort of impatience of animadversion, something like this:

“Look here, what do you expect? You fellows create a position and I, because I ’m the best man for the job, get it. Oh, yes, that ’s straight, all right. If you did n’t want bosses, you would n’t have ’em. See? You people get just what you want; just what you ’re asking for; just what you ’re worth. If you were too pure and holy to lie and cheat and steal in your corporate capacity, there ’d be no boss to lie and cheat and steal in his individual capacity. If you as a community were honest, you would n’t need and you would n’t have a boss who ’s got to be dishonest; else he would n’t be boss. And if he were n’t, someone else would be that would be dishonest. There you are!

“What do you expect? You elect a boss — oh, yes, you do. Surer than ballots, straighter than primaries, cleaner than conventions, you make your boss. All right. He ’s your political agent, the broker that buys influence and sells privilege; he ’s the middleman that saves your time and sells your public securities — and pàys himself for it.

Sure! What do you expect? Have *you* made any arrangement for paying him? You know you have n't. And you don't intend him to work for nothing any more than he intends it. Only you don't want to know how he gets paid. Very well. Part of his business is to let you play hypocrite to yourself, to deceive yourself, to lie and cheat and rob yourself. He does n't care. He works for what he gets, and so long as he gets it he does n't insist upon knowing who's his employer and making that employer know him. Only, be sure he gets his money; that's what he's boss for — just as you're butcher and baker or candlestickmaker for all that there's in it. If you choose to shut your eyes and muffle your ears and pretend that your boss is putting in his licks purely for exercise and goodwill to man and other non-assessable securities, why, all right. Only he must be a different kind of human animal than any other on earth, though he looks and acts so strikingly like an average one of you; like the average of all of you which, frankly, he is. But, just the same, you don't officially pay him any salary, do you, for attending to the duties you shirk? You elect him to the busiest, most tempting office there is; he's your left-handed dictator; every rivulet of opportunity runs chuckling right through his hands. Does he squeeze? Does he close his fingers on some of those golden dollars slipping through? Does he take his tithes? And is he his own auditor and tax-collector? Well, I wonder! If he did n't have the wit to do that, he'd never have had brains enough to get to be your boss.

“For your boss is n't born to the purple or raised in a hot-house. He has fought every inch of his way to the top. And when he gets there he knows what he wants

and he knows how to get it. And he knows you; that's his stock-in-trade. He knows just how cursed lazy you are; he knows that your slothfulness in community matters is in inverse ratio to your activity in personal affairs. You've taught him that. You get busy when you have an axe to grind; when other people's axes are to be ground you lose interest. Oh, he knows you, all right; you've been his one study-book, the book that offers premiums to the fellow who'll take trouble off your lazy hands, even if he masters you in the process and rides you to market.

"You are his market, of course; if you're not, where is it? Where does he get in? Even you are n't silly enough to believe that he works for nothing, or that his pretence of a profession or joke of a business brings him profit commensurate with his capital of brains and his experience and skill. You know better than that. You know mighty well what brains and courage and unscrupulousness like his are worth in the modern market. He'd be literally worth twice his weight in gold a year to the business freebooters of our day; and he knows it; and since you're not disposed to admit that you've hired him, why, he'll just do business on that basis with any client that comes along. Oh, he knows his worth, for he's an expert at measuring men; he meets them eye to eye, he does; there no sanctimonious flim-flam when they come to do business with him. 'Abandon Pretence, Ye Who Enter Here!' That's the inscription over his front door. Take off the padded shoulders of make-believe, the front of hypocrisy; you've come here to buy what I've got to sell. You've come because you want something, something that's to benefit you, not anybody else. It may hurt somebody else; in fact, it's bound to, if I've got it for sale, but this is business —

which is plain war — and you don't care. Neither do I. And anything that interferes with my business I'll crush if I can. And so will you.

“The only difference between us is that you *will* pretend. You're such a coward and a liar to yourself that you will dress your skull-and-cross-bones policy in pretty white ribbons and swear to its innocence. There are always exceptional circumstances that absolve each and every one of you. You're all altruists, every dollar-bloated one of you; only the cruel force of modern conditions compels you to live as the Romans do — and to plunder as even they did n't know how!

“What a farce it is, eh? Whom do you fool — yourselves? Go on, then, you don't fool me. I know you. I know the precise worth of that treasure of altruism which is kept under lock and key in the cold safe-deposit of your stone and steel hearts. It is kept there for the indulgence of your own miserly vanity, not for any good it might do. You lie back and lean on the fact that it is there. Use it? Not you. The very thought brings terror to your penurious souls. It's there for an emergency, and you'll die and your brother altruists will come swooping down upon your financial carcass, but that treasure shall lie forgotten and useless in your death as it was prisoned in your life.

“So! That is you — you with your division of yourself morally into air-tight compartments, with the strictest separation between your personal self and your business self. Why then should n't I benefit by this modern appliance by means of which a man's corporate honour may be drowned like a dog in one box, while his individual self is saved alive in another? It's a great scheme, that dual division of identities, and a clever idea (with just enough

appearance of plausibility about it to deceive dullards) that one's noble right hand should not be held responsible for the things his practical left hand wrought, being engaged in business or politics or what not, and compelled, of course, to abide by the rules of the game.

"But see how beautifully it fits my case! I am a seller of things that may not lawfully be sold. You've given me the power to sell them — but we won't dispute about that; the place is here and so am I. I am a merchant of public privileges, a business man, if you will, like yourselves. You've no respect for me but a lot of it for yourselves. Why? Don't you think I've got a safe-deposit box of my own?"

"Let me tell you a story. Once there was a business which dealt in 'blackbirds,' and that business — though now it's out of date — was a trade like any other. What the captain of the Blackbirding Industry did in his business capacity, he strongly objected to being held accountable for personally; and he has been known, in New England for instance, to be a devout and pious person, faithful to his religion and sensible to the financial necessities of his church. He was a kind and indulgent husband and father, in short, 'a good provider.' His blood stirred not unduly to rebellion against conventions (as they existed in his time; they change, you know) and the phlegmatic state of his health, perhaps, the quality of his physical temperament, made liquor and even tobacco negligible temptations to him. He was clearly one of our best citizens.

"It is pitiful to read the sad letter, in which the son of one of these business men (a lad on his first trip with his father to his business plant — the factory, so to speak) recounts and bewails that fond parent's end; he was killed at his desk,

as it were, in the very act of successful 'blackbirding,' by a brutal, unreconciled bit of dusky merchandise. Did the Chamber of Commerce of his day and all his fellow business men wag their heads over this honourable death at the post? And did the newspapers bewail the deceased, as a prominent and successful merchant, one of the pillars of the community, who had built up the 'blackbirding' industry upon which our town's prosperity so greatly depends, and repeat the list of his individual virtues that his memory might edify and be an example to the new generation of business men then in knickerbockers? Well, I wonder!

"And are n't we that generation, a few times removed, successors to the old Puritan Blackbirder's patent double-compartmented moralities? And don't I come in just as well as you — I, the boss, who live my private life (being in armour still and even sleeping in harness) more purely and decently perhaps than you; I, who observe the conventions and subscribe to the recognized decencies, ethical and religious; who keep all the commandments except one, and even keep that one according to the rules of the game?"

Thus the boss and his apology, strong with the arguments of him whose standards are the brute past and the cynical present, weak with the pessimism that corrodes, to which he owes his very existence; his wide experience, his temper, his instinct for self-justification, all proclaim it as his creed.

It's the only creed he can hold consistently and, though his accredited religion varies in different states, he is true to the unfaith that made him. And his devotion to it grows with the years, is bound to grow till it destroys him, for he comes at last inevitably to believe, and to act according to

his belief, that Truth is dead in the heart of man, and that the bitter rule of selfishness has no exceptions.

It was this that finally defeated and deposed the particular Boss whom Archibald Johns had been fighting for years. Of course, he had had preliminary reverses from which he resiliently recovered, and warnings of disaster which his cunning and skill transformed into victory. But Shorty Tracy came to him the Saturday night before the election, every vestige of colour gone from his ruddy, thickened skin, his round, good-natured face lined with anxiety, and his roguish eyes grown furtive, while he tugged at a close-cropped mustache as he sat in the Boss's ante-room and wondered what was best to do for Tracy. When he was received, all he had to say was one despairing sentence: "Well, they 've got him!"

The Boss at his desk lifted a big, shaggy head. He was a large, flabby-faced man with a nervous affection of the eyelids, which affliction he had converted into an asset by using it to gain time in emergencies, to affect a slowness of comprehension, to put his adversary off his guard, and finally to compel him, in sheer impatience and irritation, to speech. The Blinking Boss he was called by the newspapers, who treated him with cordial disrespect, and were sometimes his opponents and sometimes his partners in the progressive game of politics.

"The Wavy-eared — Brocato — they 've got him," Tracy went on, testifying unconsciously to the power of attraction in those waiting, blinking eyes. "You said that fellow Johns was n't going to Europe for his health, an' he was n't. He went an' brought Wavy back with him. What in hell we goin' to do?"

The Boss did not answer; he sat and blinked patiently,

and Tracy burst into speech, answering his unspoken question.

"The devil of it is we can't find where they 've hid him," he fumed. "No Little Italy for Wavy these days; he knows too much what they do with informers there. I've had men trailing Johns and Thwaites; nothin' doin'. Wavy ain't in Thwaites's house, for I had a buildin' inspector in there yesterday, an' a plumbin' inspector this morning, an' a garbage inspector at noon. He ain't there. I thought he might be down at the Doctor's cottage on the Island; it's a sort of far-away place that 'd be just the thing, but only the Doctor's wife is there sick, with a nurse. The waiters at the hotel where Johns stops ain't seen Wavy; they 'd know him, you know; he used to belong to their union. An' the chambermaids can't tell anything; they have n't been let into Johns's rooms, not since he got back."

An almost imperceptible motion lifted the Boss's head; Tracy noted that his eyes were keen and steady.

"Yes, I thought of that," the henchman responded. "So I sent the bell-boy up to knock, an' then later I went myself an' called his name soft, a-tellin' him I had news his baby was sick. No go. I got a glazier up on the roof of the buildin' next door fixin' a window I 'd smashed; but if he 's there he 's layin' low; we can't get at him. An'," he broke out suddenly with a cry of anxiety, "an' it's only two days till election; they can keep him there that long easy! What we goin' to do?"

The Boss did not tell him; he did not know. He sat blinking thoughtfully, his thick fingers busied with a small thermometer he had taken up from the desk, while he went over in his mind an interview with the Mayor, who had left the office as Tracy entered; his Mayor, who wanted

his help for just one more election, so that he might be strong enough to dispense with him after that and be boss and mayor in one. It was the main defect in the Boss's temperament that he could not endure hypocrisy, and the affected bonhomie of the man he had made, who purposed to betray him, and who knew his purpose was suspected, had sorely tried the Boss's patience. And now came the crushing news of Brocato's return; his boomerang had come back to him, unwelcomed. And yet, he had used this same human weapon twice before when occasion seemed to warrant it. Once it had done its work expeditiously and well; the other time it had missed, but had been saved from too serious consequences by the Boss's ameliorating power for mercy to his friends.

The Boss shot a quick, unblinking glance at Tracy. "You're sure he's back?" he asked.

"Sure." Tracy knew when a direct question called for a direct response.

The Boss's fluttering eyelids fell. Those previous experiences with his boomerang had made him careless—he saw that now. The other two times he would have defied anyone to connect him with his degraded and dutiful instrument of discipline. This last time, though, trusting to the fellow's proven loyalty and the unfaltering way he had served his term (till a kindly executive shortened it) with never a thought of compelling those who hired him to share his imprisonment. . . . Of course, if things had been as they were any time these past years it would n't necessarily matter. . . . But with a break imminent between himself and his Mayor. . . . With the uncertainties of this coming election, owing to the persistence of the Third Party and its peculiar and

unaccountable non-recognition of a system for making political fights easy and profitable. . . . A district attorney, if inimical . . .

The little thermometer broke in the Boss's hand; he caught a bit of the mercury and cradled it, as he pondered, in his thick palm.

"Tough — ain't it?" Tracy's hoarse voice was beseeching. "We — we're both in it — up to our necks. We —"

The Boss lifted his cold, blinking eyes to Tracy's and the words died on his lips. There was a silence then. Tracy's bulky little body fidgeted uncomfortably. "I say, Boss," he broke it deprecatingly, "is there any chance of them fellows out-gamin' us, gettin' a — a district attorney's office — say?"

The Boss transferred the little button of quicksilver from one palm to the other and back again. The political situation was quite as fluent, as uncertain. A three-cornered fight — what better can a boss ask than that? It costs so little to win; it takes so little to lose — profitably and undetected.

Tracy's eyes, fascinated, watched the bright little bit of running metal. He thought he understood. "Because if there is," he said in the hoarse whisper of confidence, "if there is —" And there he stopped. He was in a panic; he knew by signs unmistakable to his practiced eye that the world, his world, was about to be destroyed and created anew; he longed for a safety isle, for a hint to tell him which was better to do — to flee while there was yet time, or boldly to go over to the enemy and make capital of treason.

"I ought not to trust you, Tracy." The Boss sat up

blinking and carefully poured the bit of quicksilver into his waste-basket. The state of his retainer's mind was not obscure to him; he had in his time been a henchman himself. "You made a mess of this business. Wavy should n't have gone to Sicily."

"I know — I know," admitted Tracy in the agonies of contrition. "I ought 'a ripped him up the back as he sat shiverin' over my stove. I wish I had — I wish I had! But" — he opened his piggish little eyes as though calling Heaven to witness one's powerlessness against such inconceivable odds — "who 'd 'a believed Wavy 'd go an' get crazy, or that Johns 'd go after him?"

"I want you to go to Johns for me and arrange for a quiet talk," said the Boss, and Tracy rose as though bodily lifted from his chair. "Let him set the time and place and, if he 's suspicious" — the Boss's voice was a trifle ironical — "he can bring one man along, Thwaites. Just you telephone me the hour and the place; not another word, d' ye hear?"

Tracy nodded. He was pulling on his overcoat; the colour had come back to his roughened, florid cheeks; his little eyes were gay, even rollicking. He had reached the door, in his haste to be about the business, when the Boss spoke:

"Shorty!" he said imperatively, and Tracy turned and faced him.

Over his desk the Boss leaned and looked unblinkingly into his lieutenant's eyes.

Tracy's ruddy face grew redder and, confused, he started to protest. But the Boss put out his chin and nodded significantly; and Tracy went on his errand, faithfully intent upon duty. The Boss did have a way of holding his men; for this was he boss — a few hours longer.

It had been at Michael's suggestion that Tessy and Miss Winchell went down to Shinglesides on the Island. In town her insomnia persisted and she gained strength so slowly that he knew he must send her away from him, though to part with her in this new sweet dependence of hers was like tearing away love's tendrils that clung about his heart.

But the culmination of the campaign was in sight. Daily its intensity deepened; deepened malevolently as civil strife must toward its climax. All the phlegm of a well-balanced nature and the courage of a well-intentioned one the candidate needed to bear the calumnies, the accusations, and insinuations directed against him, and even against that Laura Whitaker, dead these many years, who had neglected to call herself by her husband's name. But Michael threw himself into work, and his speeches became the expression of a determination to meet every issue honestly, to expose and render fangless every poisonous implication, and to make every endeavour conceivable toward victory; for there was a scientific thoroughness about him intolerant of the superficial, and a capacity for concentrated effort that made him a tower of strength to the cause he captained.

When his spirits flagged and his body felt the strain so long endured, he telephoned a word of greeting to the cottage and heard the voice he loved in reply; he opened his heart in daily letters and re-read the words in which her impassioned tenderness, no longer checked, spent itself.

Outstretched in her chair and wrapped in rugs, Tessy would lie for long hours upon the sands, often falling asleep in the salty open, with his latest letter, for a talisman, under her cheek. Once when she waked, her eyes fell upon a

low basket heaped with great, deep-hearted pansies in a bed of ferns that he had sent, and she put out her hand to them as to something sentient, and recanted. They gave her back sensibility, sympathy with the manifestations of earth's loveliness. From then the world seemed to bloom again with beauty, while the tender touch of reconciling Nature healed her.

She came to be strong enough, not to avoid memory, but to meet and direct it; and gradually the nobler philosophy waked in her, so that she could look largely on the dear life that was ended and see in it completeness — brief but shorn of tragedy. Resolutely she turned her mind from morbid contemplation of the last swift horror of extinction to the joyous expression of life that had preceded it. She created again within herself her memory of the beautiful bay and the white cliffs she had seen once in her girlhood, and with old Giosue she, too, looked through the vibrantly tender, still moonlight, upon the lovers as they mounted the hill, his balancing body straight and strong, his beautiful boyish head uncovered, bearing her lightly on his shoulder as the very crown of his life. In time they came to live for her like this; whenever she thought of them it was in an imperially ardent mounting, a glorified, eternal ascent, the two young figures in perfect union lending the high light of life to an exquisite natural setting. And that culmination of life (she looked into her own heart, enlightened now with the tender passion that filled it) had all of the best there is on earth; whatever came after it — not even Death's swift closure could blot out that breathing picture. And perhaps — perhaps it was well, after all, that there were no more to follow it. Life's ecstasy, having mounted so radiantly high, the curtain fell poetically upon the two

bright figures and fixed them so forever in the hearts that loved them.

For herself — and Tessy came inevitably to face herself, as the quieting, strengthening days passed — her course was simple: to accept with humility, to give, as it was in the fulness of her nature to give, and to await the future, confident that love, unselfish and chastened, must find a way to make straight and clear even so tangled, so devious, a course as this of hers. Through suffering she had reached the mothering heights of passion whence women look protectingly upon the beloved; it was not of herself she thought, when Michael should know the truth, but of him. In the perfection of understanding that had grown between them, she knew herself, her very self, beloved; the time of doubt, when she had deemed that love a mistaken thing, a masquerading passion for the identity she had assumed, was gone. It was her own, her very own. That it had been Trix's only made it the more hers, for it seemed in its potent passion to recreate the first in the later love and fuse them into one for him to lavish its wealth upon. Yes, she knew now, she knew. And upon this surety, conscience slept as tranquilly as she herself had a fortnight since upon his outstretched arms.

And so, there between the immensities of sea and sky, Tessy solved as best she could the riddle of death and life, and listened to the voice of Nature and her heart, waiting, as at times it seemed as though winter itself were waiting — so soft were the afternoons, so mild still with the spent languor of autumn — till he should be with her.

He had promised to run down the Sunday before election, but instead of himself hurrying out over the sands to where she waited for him, Miss Winchell came bringing her his

letter. Johns's ship had come in and brought him back and Brocato with him, the note ran. The three were to have a meeting that night, and in the morning they hoped — they believed — they almost knew, from certain overtures that had been made to them, the Boss himself would come into camp. That meant victory, "and you, sweetheart," he concluded. "I'm coming to you Tuesday night — it may be late — a winner, I believe; but that does n't matter. I'm coming to you. You'll take me into your heart and rest me, won't you, and keep me there? Oh, the garden of delight! And we'll live there all our lives and never be apart again."

Her tears fell upon the pages, and her friend bent over to comfort her. But Tessy smiled up at her. "It's because I'm so happy, dear Miss Winchell," she said, as she rose from her chair. She would not have the nurse's arm about her to help her back to the cottage that day; she was too happy to be ill, she declared, and proved it.

From town came newspapers and messages telling her of the convulsing happenings in that civic warfare, but Therese Thorley was all woman in those days; the terrific struggle of an undermined political power to keep its place, the assaults upon the besiegers who could hear the bells of victory already a-chime, the blackening of reputations, the shame in high places — it meant to her only *his* triumph, his reward that he had earned and deserved, his satisfaction — his possession.

When the last afternoon came and Miss Winchell had gone into the village, there to wait at a friend's house for the evening train to town, Tessy wandered from room to room of the cottage with a precious sense of possession, of intimacy and sweet privacy. These she would divide with

him, and everything she would do for him herself; wait on him and serve him and soothe him, care for him and share with him the joy of being shut in together alone.

Toward evening it grew cold, and the first light, scattered, tentative snow-flakes fell. She welcomed them; they contributed to her delicious sense of isolation. She raised the window shade and stirred the log fire; it roared and hummed up the deep-throated chimney, and she danced in her delight before it.

The rooms were few at Shinglesides; the living room was the dining room, and she turned from the fire to look critically at the table set and waiting. She passed into the little kitchen and made sure all was ready there. And then the telephone bell rang and she heard his voice. When she hung up the hook, she turned to face the little interior, holding her hands over her heart to still it. Had it heard? Did it know? In an hour, he had said. Just that—in an hour.

She ran to her room. There was a mirror there, not large nor well placed, but, by standing well away from it, she could see from her throat, from which the collar was turned away, down to the hem of her skirt. How could she dress for him, except with utmost simplicity? She dared not look upon her face; she was afraid of something in her own eyes. But she beheld the little figure the glass reflected, and gave a touch to the slender belted waist and the short trim skirt. And then she threw herself beside her bed and buried her face in the pillows; but lifted it in a moment to listen if it could be his step on the veranda without. But gradually quiet came to her and contemplation. As she sat and thought, her eyes were fixed unconsciously upon the mirror opposite. She seemed to see before her the pitiful,

inspiring procession of humanity, in which one must take his place as best he can with faith in self and a simple trust in all outside of self. The humility of the happy came upon her and lifted her out of egotistic individuality into larger living. Something within her was all a-tune and beating time to the march of the universe.

It was this she was facing, not the silent young creature in the glass yonder who looked back with dream-dulled eyes, unseeing at first, yet imperceptibly drawing her away from serene contemplation of herself as an infinitesimal atom of composite womankind to scrutiny of an individual existence. Before she knew it she was bending forward, searching impersonally the face before her. It had suffered, it had aged — had it learned? It was a thoughtful, eager face, the hair curling at the nape of the neck; the closed lips strong and serene, a faint colour painting the cheeks, the eyes, larger since illness had sharpened the features, almost vocal with expression.

Her lids fluttered and fell; she could not meet those eyes, those eyes that knew her as she had been, that confessed to her, that betrayed her. She covered them with her hands, and so she sat withdrawn into her secret self, till suddenly she lifted her head and looked again.

What she saw brought her to her feet. There, in the glass opposite (for the swift moment before she faced about) behind her new self stood that other, younger self — the old Tessy Thorley, a fuller figure, the outline of the face more childishly uncertain, the eyes more mysterious, less frankly brave and sure, but the lips apart as they used to be, and a hand outstretched in the old eager pose.

It flashed through her mind, in the second it took to meet and accept the impression, that this was what might

have happened months ago if Beatrix had really died then, this wistful, watchful wraith of her. She turned sharply and faced it. "Trixy!" she whispered, but no sound came from her lips, and now she knew; not the old Tessy Thorley, this, no miracle, no unreality, but the sister of her soul come back to her.

"My Trixy!" she cried, and caught her in her arms.

CHAPTER XXIII

JUST to feel you, Tessy — just to feel you!" Trix murmured. She nestled close within the arms that bound her and they tightened tenderly. "It's the only thing on earth I've been longing for," she said after a while. "Sometimes I used to dream that I had it, that you had 'loved' me again, Texsy, and when I waked I was sorry I had n't died in my sleep."

"Trixy!" Speech had not come to her yet, she could only exclaim and hold her loved one close; but it was she who drew Trix down to the couch finally and sat beside her holding her in her arms.

"But now — now that I am really here with you, dearie, it is all so terribly unreal — all that over there. I'd — I'd believe it had n't happened if my heart did n't lie here in me" — Trix's hands sought her breast — "like a dead, cold thing. Such a horrible, dead-cold feeling it is, as though" — her voice fell to a hushed whisper — "as though it were my poor little dead baby still there!"

"Trix!" Tessy took her sister's face between her hands and caressed it while, her own eyes brimming over, she looked upon its tearless calm.

"Yes." Trix nodded. "It killed my baby — that night did — and — and Dick. But it did n't kill me. Was n't that a mistake, Tess? Was n't that a mistake?"

Her voice was so plaintive that it wrung Tessy's heart,

but there was no note in it of passion, of the throbbing grief that finds relief in tears. Tessy drew the sad little face down on her breast and rocked her sister softly in her arms. She, too, grew calm, as they sat there; she saw again that glorious mounting of the lovers in the moonlight up the winding stone road the monks had cut; she bowed her head upon the quiet one that lay upon her bosom and ached for very sympathy.

"We would have gone together, you know," Beatrix spoke presently, without stirring, "but — a restlessness came over me when I waked. I could n't sleep again and I was afraid of disturbing him. He — he had not been happy, Tess, for days, till that night. He had been thinking and fretting, and when he worried he could not sleep. He tried to keep it from me, but I knew."

"Yes — yes." From the very core of her heart Tessy's concurrence came.

"But — oh, my God!" In a moment Trix had lifted herself; her hands were clasped and, upheld by the passion renaescent in her, she sat upright and alone. "How happy we were that night! How happy — how happy we were! My God, how frightfully happy!"

She rose from her seat, swaying in her misery, her hands behind her uplifted head, her eyes upturned in mute appeal against the memories that racked her. Tessy's yearning eyes were upon her, but she did not rise to follow her; they were separated again. At the apex of sorrow one stands alone. The living presence of Trix's second self was not so strong as the vivid memory the dead had left behind. And Tessy, enlightened by her own heart, bowed her head understanding. She, too, was possessed by memories; she, too, in that moment, was aware of the

overpowering, monopolizing might of love's passion. She shivered as she sat there, torn by pity; she had an intolerable sense of guilt, of confusion, but she could not think yet, she could only feel.

"You must tell me, Trixy," she pleaded. "Better tell me about it. Come — come back." And she opened her arms.

But Trix shook her head. "I can't — now," she said struggling with herself. "It's come on me again — oh, to be dead — to be dead with him!" She eluded Tessy's trembling hand that would have caught her and, retreating to the window, stood there — not looking out, her hands were covering her face; she was looking within and beyond.

She turned when, after some minutes had passed, she felt Tessy's arm again about her; her face was calm and her voice almost passionless. "I wonder if you can understand, Tess," she began slowly, "what it means to know the father of your child is dead and the baby yet unborn."

Tessy faced her; what was within her, the great change that had come to her, she could not reveal in words, but she gave her face to be read, hoping, fearing, praying Beatrix might sense the miracle.

"No, I suppose not," Trix said after a moment. Sorrow blinded her; her eyes were bright and keen, but they could not read that speaking face. "No one can without having had it happen to them. It's — it's something distinct, as though a special punishment had been created to fit your case. It's as though God had said — 'Just plain sorrow is not enough for you. For you to suffer like other people won't do. I'll take the sunshine out of your life, of course, but I'll kill the heart in you, too. . . .' That's what He did to me,"

"Don't — don't, Trixy!" Tessy begged. This low-voiced despair was like a cold echo of that fierce, resenting madness from which she herself had so lately recovered.

"I — it — it doesn't make it any worse to say it." Trix's words were almost explanatorily commonplace, but absence of expression in that lilting voice made frightfully clear to her listener the agonies that had brought it to this level monotone. "Of course, I've thought it out. I've had time enough over yonder in all these months, with only an Italian fisherman's wife to look after me while I balanced between life and death and pulled so hard, so unavailingly hard, on the death side of the scales. And later, too, when I was in the convent — I tried that, too." She relapsed into thought, and Tessy waited in speechless misery. "It makes it clearer to say it to you," she began again presently, "but I can't see now, any more than the priests could make me see over there, what's the good of it. It's too late to teach me, and it won't teach some other one like me. For if — if it were to be done over again, if all of it — yes, just for that one night, I'd do as I did. I would — I'd do as I did!"

Tessy's hands went to her throbbing throat; with every word of that calm voice there came a revelation of self that seemed to strip her bare. She almost knew the word that was to come next and stood braced to hear it on those lips; but when it came she hid her face and closed her eyes and cowered down within her soul, summoning all her fortitude to bear it.

"You see," said Beatrix almost gently, "in a way I did no real wrong, for Michael — poor old Michael — was not hurt. He's gone right on with his life as though I did n't matter. I guess it was really best for him, after

all. I did n't know over there how you and he had arranged it; it's a queer way, but you did it for me — I know, I know — and if you both thought it best . . .” Her voice dropped as though that side of it had no interest for her. “You see, I could get no news, for Dick's fear of meeting people we knew was like terror of a pest. He could n't even bear to see me looking over a home paper; he — he wanted me to feel, he tried to make himself feel, that the new name we'd taken was our own; and he seemed to believe that if we shut the past down tight and never thought of it, and kept living hard the new life, in time we'd come to believe in ourselves and — in time, the sting of remorse would stop burning in his poor heart. But it never did. I knew, though I played the make-believe with all my soul and — and succeeded, for myself, it was no use. He had no peace, he could not rest; sleep never came to him till toward morning. Neither does it come now. But his nature was so sweet and simple, he could not be at war with himself; if he could not justify himself and live true, he could not live at all. The end would have come some other way, I suppose. But he lived in torment, although he pretended, too — with the sweat of his agony in his beautiful eyes, he pretended hard to me. But, oh, to hear him when sometimes, some few, few terrible times, he cried out to Michael in his sleep — oh, God! — oh, God!” She swayed in remembering misery and Tessy, shivering, waited; she no longer sought to check that bitter stream; part of it was hers, she felt; part of it she, too, must own. In Trix's confession she confessed herself.

“But there were times — like that night!” Beatrix's voice was quiet again, low and vibrating with tremulous

joy. "When I dressed and left him sleeping and went outdoors, out toward the road, it seemed to me in all that earth and sea and sky nothing had ever breathed as happy as I. The world was big with mystery, palpitating. It — it almost seemed to me I could hear the breathing of God in the silence without me, as I could feel the life, within. . . . And then it came — the shiver of the earth and the avalanche! I felt its sickening loosening. I heard its awful roar. I saw it strike to the bottom of the bay the ships lying peacefully at anchor, and then — then I did not know any more. You see, it was as though a hand had led me just far enough to be almost out of its path. The shock of it, though, knocked me senseless and sent me whirling down with the slipping earth into the bay. I was n't hurt much, and could struggle out after awhile. I — I can't remember very clearly after that; I must have struck on my head and been out of my mind for a time. I can see that crazy creature that was me doing different things — crazy, useless things, and being baffled by the fishermen who had picked her up out of the water, swimming, they said, in the direction of Atrani, where she insisted she had come from. She had lost the sense of direction, poor thing, and though it was the deepest instinct of her life to get back to Amalfi, she cried for very joy when she saw the boat that picked her up was bound the other way. It was so with everything she wanted; she wanted straight and thought she was making for it, but the queer tangle in her brain pulled wrong threads and twisted things and drove her farther and farther from the place she wanted to go. Time, too, got mixed; it was like a nightmare. She 'd sleep and not know she had slept a night, but think it was the same day. She 'd lie half-stunned for days and

stagger to her feet believing it was just a moment before that she had felt the mountain shiver under her feet and then go roaring, tearing down. Poor thing — poor thing! . . . No, don't pity her, Tessy." She put her arms about the sobbing girl who flung herself upon her breast. "Pity the woman that waked. Pity her — the woman that waked."

Gently, but with a preoccupation that she scarcely realized, she held Tessy to her, stroking her hair and laying her cheek against hers, but calmly, as though she knew grief like this was something that would pass, something that needed but expression to relieve it.

"It was when I waked that I understood — not — not that Dick was gone from me. I knew that — all through, every minute; no matter how crossed the wires in my brain were, I knew that. It seems to me I had known it before I was thrown down. And when I was trying to get back to him, it was n't that I did n't know I should never hear his voice again, but just a blind instinct to get where his body was. . . . No, what came to me was this: you can't do a thing like I did, you can't be selfish without hurting somebody; and God's wise — cleverer by far than you can be, no matter how cleverly you think things out. He manages it so that the one you hurt is the one you'd willingly be crucified for — only your love crucifies him instead. That's what I did to Dick. I murdered the soul of him; I drove nails deep into his conscience, his honour, his faith in himself — and his spirit bled to death. And then God — knowing what a sweet soul it was, what a gallant fight it had made, and how really not to blame, since all the fault was mine and me — sent the merciful avalanche to put my poor boy out of his misery. Thank God for that!"

The reverent sincerity in that placid voice stilled Tessy's sobs. But it seemed to chill the blood within her; an unconquerable, nervous trembling, disassociated from fear or cold, came over her. It was as though the brimming, passionate love of life, when life means love, shivered within her with involuntary, physical repulsion from the cold, dead touch of resignation. Could one get so far as this? her waked spirit cried. And since Trix, who was the embodied joy of life, had traveled even this far on the terrible road — came the swift second thought — could she, too — should she . . .

She lifted Trix's arms. A sudden sense of the unfitness of it struck upon her. She rose and stood a moment, looking upon Beatrix, who had sunk down in the window-seat, with a passionate sympathy, a tender, tortured realization of it all. Then restlessly she began to pace the floor.

From time to time that quiet, one-toned voice added depth and detail to the tragic story; but a din of voices had broken loose in Tessy's breast — child voices, grave old voices that cried to her from out the past; they clamoured for attention, they shook her with the intensity of their demands for recognition, but so moved was she, she could not single out the thread of thought she sought with desperation; nor would she yield to that other imperious, insistent call whose cry filled her soul with the swelling of its volumed music till she thought her heart would break with the glad agony of holding it!

And then, suddenly, the confusion within her was stilled, for from the road outside came a long, deep, musical hum. Was it that that she had heard, as it were sub-consciously, while it was still beyond hearing? Was it that real vocal signal which over-wrought nerves had transmuted into a

voice within her? She did not know; she only heard it, and heard it growing louder and louder till a sense of its imminence sent her flying with outstretched hands to Beatrix.

"What is it?" Trix rose; she, too, had heard. In the stillness of that out-of-the-way spot, the signal was significant. "What is it?" she repeated. "Not — not —"

Tessy nodded. "It's Michael," she said simply, "coming home."

Mechanically Trix's clenched fingers unclosed and her gloves fell to the floor. The slight sound jarred upon Tessy's nerves and that uncontrollable trembling came upon her again.

"We must go," said Beatrix, her calmness stirred; she moved about quickly, uneasily. "I can't — of course, of course, I can't. . . . I had thought of Thorley, Tessy. I've been thinking so long of Thorley. We'll go there, shall we?"

Tessy nodded. She was trying to think; to think and act quickly while there was still time for voluntary action. And all through those precious moments blurred the crescendo of that message she could but receive and translate, since her heart held its key and every fibre of her body throbbed in unison with it.

"I'm coming — coming — coming," it hummed, insistently triumphant, "to you — to you — you — you!"

As she stood listening, her head uplifted, her eyes half-closed, her lips parted and her breath coming quick, there was no mistaking the expectancy, the receptivity, of that poise. Its significance penetrated even the loneliness of such sorrow as Beatrix's. "Tessy," she said, incredulously, "you — you are coming away?"

Again Tessy nodded, but she stood as though entranced.

"Come, then."

"But not — not right now. . . I can't — not immediately, but very — almost — oh! —"

In a moment Trix's hands were on her shoulders and Trix's eyes were amazedly searching hers.

"It's because I love him now, Trixy," she murmured brokenly, appealingly, "with all my soul!"

Trix's hands fell and, over the space her quick recoil set between them, the two looked at each other.

A realization of that gap, its estranging circles widening with appalling rapidity, came to Tessy. "Listen — listen, dear," she cried. "I can't come with you this minute because — because of — of this. But I'll come right after you, and when we're together for good I'll make you understand and — and pity me. Oh, you must, you will! But now let me have a little time to — to think and see how to — how not to hurt him — because — oh, I can't tell you, but listen, Trixy, listen —"

"No — no, no! I can't!" With a cry Trix had reached the door. "I don't understand; it's — it's —" She held up protesting, shaking hands. "I can't be here. Oh, I must n't . . . Don't you see I must n't?"

Her agitation appealed pathetically to Tessy; she fought down her own emotion. "Hush, dear," she said soberly. "This is the way." She caught her sister's hand and guided her through the bedroom to the rear of the little place. "Now, listen — yes, you must listen, Trixy, and believe me, too, for I can't let you go unless you promise you will believe me and count upon me. When — when the chauffeur brings the car around here, you will get in and have him take you to the station. And there — there

you will meet my nurse, Miss Winchell, who goes up to town to-night. Here is her card." She caught it up from the table, and pressed it with her gloves into Beatrix's hands. "She will take care of you. You'll go out to the Settlement house, dear old Number Seventeen, remember? And there you will wait for me. You'll wait for me, for I'm coming on the next train — I don't know just when it is, but I'm coming — do you hear, Trixy, I'm coming — Trixy!" She had Trixy's hands in hers, and she pulled them now up about her neck, and for a second they stood in silence, close embraced.

There came the sharp slam of the cottage door and the hum of the car as it turned and shot around to the rear. They fell apart and Beatrix stepped out, while Tessy stood, her back to the door through which her sister had gone, her eyes closed, her hands groping for support, her body shaken like the trembling poplar in a storm.

Michael found her there. Though his approaching footsteps were echoed in the beating of her heart, though it leaped to meet him, she could not move till his arms were about her. And then she prayed they might never unclothe, or that she might not live to know it.

But here was a man, fresh from vigorous contact with the world, a militant force that had conquered, and here was a lover, a lover again after long alienation. He laughed at her emotion and misunderstood it and loved her for it, and kissed her pale face till it glowed and she trembled in his arms, when he laughed again in deep content. He was so strong, it seemed to her, in his power over the world and over her, and yet so boyishly, exuberantly happy, now that they were together, that she cried to herself she could

not spoil this beautiful happening — not right away — not so fatally soon. So, fearfully at first, and then with gaining recklessness, she played the rôle for which time and place and circumstances had cast her.

Did she play it — or did it play her? All she did, she said to herself afterward, was just not to resist; just to be passive and let his mood be hers; just to react under the stimulus of his high-spirited delight in being, that night, and to share and double it; to tremble under his caress and yield this once to her own longing to smooth his harsh, thick hair, to catch his hand to her throat, to kneel before him and with tender, loving palms try to erase the lines in his face that care and stress and anxiety had worn; to have for her own the memory of tender, whispered words and fanciful lovers' names; to listen to the full round measure of his laugh and, for very joy in it, forget the past and the future, and all beside except his gladness!

Oh, the relief of it! The rapture of putting all the world away and living that golden hour as she had intended to live it, as it should be lived; to sing and laugh and chatter as she prepared his supper while he, with a boyish zest in picnicking, demanded a share of the work, gaily took toll on every dish he placed, and finally bore her off to the table with him, to a burlesqued whistled minuet.

As he lingered over his coffee he told her the details of his victory, and she listened eager-eyed, intent. But what he told her she never knew, for now she was merely joying in his presence, and now she was only looking into his face to remember it and listening to his voice, that she might never forget how it broke its flowing narrative to inclose her lovingly in an adoring name, and how his hands reached out and held her, toward the climax, not like a lover's,

but as comrade seeks comrade when the fight is won. And all the time, she was thinking, preparing, planning — despite the incredible horror of it — how she must leave him.

“We’ll spend the whole of our honeymoon here — right here, Trix,” he said, as he pushed his chair toward the fire and drew her down to him.

He had had many names for her that evening; all the gamut of pretty titles he had ranged to find the one that suited best his lover’s delight in her. But he had not spoken this name till now, and the pronouncing of it there, where still that other presence lingered, hurt her tenderly, shamed her.

“Yes, dear,” she said gently, “the whole of it. Really, though, we two — we’re just a Mary and John, any Mary and John, just two people who care, that’s all. Names don’t count, do they? So — so I’ll be Mary for — for the rest of the time, John, my John.”

“Will you?” he mocked. “Oh, will you? You can make me John, if you will. God knows, whatever you call me, the word is made all fine and dainty and sweet with the flowering of your lips. But you — oh, you’re not Mary. It does n’t fit. I know — I know your name,” he added slowly, “no one else does, but I know it. It’s Joy — Joy Thwaites, the joy of Michael.”

About the little house the subtle, soft hush of the snowflakes fell, a fairy-like lightness of motion and sound. Within, the wood fire’s soft, sated glow enwrapped them.

“Oh, it’s good — it’s good to be home again!” Michael sighed. “We’ve — sweetheart, we’ve travelled far — apart!”

She put her fingers on his lips and he kissed and held them there.

"Mary and John," he murmured, softly hindered by that light touch on his lips. "We — my darling, we'll call the babies by those names, and every time we say them, no matter how often, through the years, they'll never grow common to us, nor lack significance; they'll have upon them the blessing, the memory, of this place to-night."

His lips sought hers but she turned her face and hid it in his breast; it was wet with tears. He laughed, a low-voiced laugh of utter content. "I want the children, sweet," he whispered, "I want, while yet I can, to see you with our child at your breast. Jealously I want another and another bond between us. Oh, God, my darling, before the mounting years go by, piling higher and higher the wall which is to immure me, which seals me up sightless in my body's tomb, I want to see your eyes in my children's eyes, to have all the world can give me before my time comes to walk in darkness!"

"Michael — Michael!" she cried, lifting her frightened face.

"Yes — yes," he said quietly, as she searched his eyes, "it's coming. Oh, yes, beloved, I know it is. Let's not deceive ourselves. It's some time off, but I know now, looking back, how relentlessly it has been coming. I should not have told you to-night, should I? I didn't intend to. Forgive me, sweetheart. There — there, don't mind. I'll know some loving voices to take with me into the blackness where colour dies and form is blurred. I'll have remembrance of faces, young and gay and full of life — faces differing and changeful yet all a play on the face I have by heart—but not as it looks now, my darling!" he added quickly. "Come, come, Joy, sight is not everything. And if it is, I have it, having everything in you, thank God!"

She did not answer. She put her arms about him and with his head on her breast she held him and leaned her cheek on his thick hair, her light body like a living shield that would be between him and the blight that threatened. As she held him to her, she murmured lovingly to him under her breath, almost as a mother might to the child of her heart and, touched to inexpressible tenderness, he sat in silence while his soul, gratefully uplifted to that soft rain of endearment, humbly prayed and promised.

"I'm sealing your poor eyes, my love," she was whispering as, rising she bent over him and kissed each lid close. "And I'm sealing your ears, and your lips, darling. It's a seal that's marked with my very own name and it means — oh, my heart, you know what it means! Whatever comes, you — you cannot mistake it. Say you can't, say you won't. Say it!"

"I can't — I won't," he said with closed eyes humouring her fantasy. "But now, of course," he added lightly, "you must seal the lips again."

She bent and kissed him. "Oh, look at me again," she prayed, and afterward she touched each lid once more with her lips.

He sat as she had left him, with head thrown back, a smile upon his lips, such peace in his heart, such welling tenderness as he had not known the world could hold. He was content to sit there waiting. It seemed, oddly, to him as though the delicate fabric of her pretty spell lay upon him and he must not move for fear of breaking something intangibly, exquisitely fine. The snow fell softly without; the spent log breathed its still warm, fragrant breath. So content he was, he dared fancy what it was to be blind, and blindness seemed a soft and gentle, almost caressing

thing, so quieting and calm. He heard her step, as she moved about the next room, and smiled to himself; if one day were set to harmonies such as this, so quiet, deep, and tender, one might meet his fate and bear it manfully. And in that resolution he dismissed further conflict, his limbs relaxed, his soul went dreaming, and the future smile before him. . . .

CHAPTER XXIV

IT WAS good for Tessy Thorley to be compelled to listen to the wondering stream of questions that poured from Miss Gregory's lips. It roused her from the benumbing sense of unreality which had closed about her on the train during the little journey to Panhandle Place.

For, with every passing moment, she had been bidding good-bye to that new, sweet identity that was not her own nor the one she had assumed, but a composite of time and characters and circumstances; a sort of third sister — in short, merely the woman Michael Thwaites loved. And now he no longer loved that woman, since he knew her deceit; so she lapsed from existence, to which she had held only by the sweet strength of his need and love for her; all she had been was his, all she got was from him. Her love for him, though, curiously persisted, despite Tessy's bewilderment at a love that endured after disembodiment. But she came to think of that third woman as having lately died, and her mind, straining back to the cottage she had left, could conceive of the man there alone as mourning — not for her, but for the woman he loved. She, too, mourned that woman passionately, inconsolably. And yet every moment of her journey to the Settlement hurried her farther away from the Beloved One, as well as from him who sorrowed for her.

The new Tessy Thorley she herself was to become looked

at her with strange, cold eyes; they had nothing in common, these two; not years of days stretched between them, but eternities of feeling. And yet it was, it must be, Tessy Thorley who was going back to Panhandle Place, since Trix was already there, and the Beloved One had vanished like some creature so brightly fortunate the gods had envied her and struck her from the roll of living things.

Anne Gregory's first words sent her back, though, into bewilderment and doubt. "My dear — my dear," she said, her brown eyes tender with the tears she had shed, "she's lying there in her own bed, such a dear little wreck of what she was. But, oh, it's good to have her back!"

Tessy looked long at her friend. Her mental processes were slow, she was so fatigued, but she understood — Trix had made no explanation. Though the emptiness of the part she must continue to play mocked her, Tessy was relieved. To-morrow would be time enough; to-morrow, when a long night should have intervened between the passing of the Beloved and the re-creation of that narrow, outgrown Tessy, whose identity cramped her very soul.

"Yes, it's good — good," she said softly. "My poor girl!"

"She must have suffered terribly," said Anne, helping her off with her wraps. "How did it happen exactly? She tried to tell me, but she was too tired, so I got her to bed."

Tessy did not answer. Her mind had wandered with that phrase of Anne's. "She must have suffered terribly," she repeated slowly. Yes — yes, she must have. She had lost all, poor Trixy! But she had had, ay, she had had! While, she, Tessy, had lost all, too, and yet . . . She stretched out her arms with an aching sense of emptiness.

"You — you're not well yourself?" asked Anne solicitously. "Why, dear, you look tired to death."

Tessy nodded. "I think I am," she said. "On the train once my very life seemed to go out. I'm tired — tired. I — I've been through so much to-day," she added weakly.

"Of course — of course." Miss Gregory busied herself in making her comfortable. She swung the lounge about and insisted upon her friend's lying down. She brought a pillow and a comforter and a glass of wine. "It's the strain of the election," she said soothingly. "How wonderfully well it came out, did n't it?"

"Wonderfully well," repeated Tessy. Her own voice sounded to her now as Trix's had at the cottage, monotonous, robbed of shadings, calm and dead. Was it only a few hours ago the news of victory had been telephoned to her, and she had danced, actually danced, a few gay little steps for sheer joy? "Is she asleep?" she asked suddenly.

"Tessy? Oh, yes," answered Anne marvelling. "She said she could n't sleep; she insisted she knew she would n't sleep. She said she had n't been able to get a natural sleep for so long, ever since the accident. But I told her the old little bed would soothe her, and sure enough it did."

"She fell right asleep?"

"Not right away. I sat beside her a long time. We talked."

Tessy's wearied eyes questioned her.

"Of — Dick," said Annie slowly. "She made me remind her of everything that had happened when he was with us here. I told her she knew more than I, but she said she could n't remember, and anyway, I saw it comforted

her to talk about him. So I went over all the old times with her."

Tessy nodded comprehendingly, pityingly.

"She had forgotten even the names of the boys in his club," Anne went on gently. "We planned, she and I, what she could do for each one. Dear little girl, how she loved him — poor Dick!"

Again Tessy nodded. Poor Dick! And yet for him that way up through the moonlight at Amalfi had been a processional, mounting to the apogee of life. What was there left for the three that remained — Trix, Michael and herself? "I thought she would wait for me," she said after a time.

"She wanted to, but she was so weary, I made her go to bed. She said she expected you soon. You could n't have come with her or kept her, I suppose?" Anne's soft eyes searched the face opposite. It had not touched the pillow; it was lifted and turned toward the window. It troubled Anne.

"I could n't." The low words were sorrowful, final. "I could n't come with her."

"On Michael's account," said Anne gently, trying to comprehend.

Tessy sat up suddenly facing her; the colour flooded her face and throat. Then she turned and lay down again. She was so shaken, she could not remember what part she was playing, both rôles were so empty to her, so hollow. There was only one that throbbed with life, the Beloved's! Oh, that seemed a wonderful one, full of spirit and colour; it stood out brilliantly from its golden background, potential, tender, creative, doubly strong and beautiful by virtue of its two-fold capacity for loving and being loved, harmonious with itself and linked harmoniously with futurity.

"Had n't you better go to bed, too, my dear?" Miss Gregory asked.

Tessy shook her head. "Let me lie here," she said, "for a little while. I'll go presently. Don't you wait for me, Anne. Good-night — thank you."

She pressed her friend's hand and watched her as she set the room in order and left at last reluctantly. Even after she had gone Tessy's eyes lingered on the door through which she had passed, as though they could see beyond and beyond the place and the time through all the places and times that straitened, kindly life should take its course. Once, that way had been her own and it had not looked unfruitful, drearily confined, and shallowly lacking. But that was before the birth of the Beloved, who had sprung to life full-clothed with years and potency and high, sweet endeavor. Now — now, could Tessy Thorley go back and really live again that old narrow life? She saw herself, as in a vision, creeping dully through the years, cold, quiet years of effort to win back again interest in impersonal things. No — no. It was a dead thing upon which in vain she breathed the breath of fancy; it would not move, it lay inert, unresponsive. She shivered at its immobility, and yet she bent her mind upon it and would not let it go, for lying in wait was that she dreaded more than the barren future imagination pictured. Again and again in her feverish flight to town she had wrenched herself from contemplation of it; again and again it had out-marched her thoughts and confronted them. She knew it was coming as surely as retribution had come to that defiant, conscienceless, glorious Beloved who had perished, since Michael's heart had cast her out into nothingness. Yet she fought it off,

feebly postponing full consideration of it till she should be strong enough to face it.

It came though, after all, in the subtle, inevitable way such things have. The rising wind brought it, perhaps, or the softly hurrying snow, or just inexplicable consciousness, it may be, of the arrival of winter. For, all at once, so plainly, so clearly it made reality pale, Therese Thorley saw the cottage on the sands, isolated, besieged by the winds, enshrouded with the hurrying snow. And within, a lonely man bereft of the very ideal that might have kept his heart warm; a man suddenly summoned to face the worst and battle with it there alone.

She saw him rise from his place before the fire. She heard him call, at first with that low music his deep voice kept for one alone to hear, and then again, an imperious note that joyed and troubled her. And then again . . .

"I am not Trix [she had written in the large characters his lacking sight demanded]. I am Tessy. It was Trix who ran away with Dick. I — stayed and lied to you. I wish you could believe me crazy — but I'm not, I'm only base and cowardly and frightfully unhappy. Trix came back to-night, an hour or so ago. I'm going to her now. My God, what misery we two, between us, have made for you! Forgive. **TESSY.**"

The words of that curt, agitated note seemed set to a dirge of all their hopes, his and hers. In the fleeting, phantom-like pictures that passed before her she saw his face as he read. Incredibility there was in it, and then he read again and, still unbelieving, but with the help of crowding memories, again. And then he stood and pondered and his face grew cold and hard. Every line graven upon it sank deeper, locked faster within it all tenderness, till it seemed an inexorable mask of pitiless anger; and

his eyes, his poor, poor eyes burned black with wrath, steely, shining black at the treachery that could live so close and lie so warm and cut at last with such cruel skill.

Quietly, quietly, in the dumb fervour of woe, Therese Thorley sat and rocked her anguished soul. This was not a thing to weep over, its clawing hurt was too keen. She could only sit bowed and broken while the bitter waves swept on before them all the little, pathetic wreckage of palliation. She could not put out a hand to grasp them, as they whirled past her; she was too weak, too broken. In her misery she could only wonder at herself for being what she was, and at them for being excuses.

And having fallen so low, her rebellious heart lifted her to the height again where the Beloved stood pedestaled upon the security of his love. Oh, had some compassionate calamity come upon them then, crying finis at the very flood of that passion which exalted both! For her, never to have drawn another breath than that last she breathed with his lips on hers. For him, never to have known he had held deceit in his arms and opened his heart to it and been betrayed.

She was back again in the depths. And to this heart-breaking ascent and fall, this purgatory of mental action and reaction, she was doomed, it seemed to her, forever. What a fitting form of punishment it was for such a sin as hers, ingeniously adapted to feeding the flame that consumed her! And how futile, how wasteful, tardy, ineffective, like all punishment! If only she could forget that the Beloved had lived! If only she might lie in those bitter, remorseful depths till capacity for suffering was killed within her . . . as it seemed to be in Trixy — Trixy, metamorphosed by misery into a drugged semblance of her joyous self.

A sudden longing came over her; she had not adequately felt that sister-soul's misfortune, she had not been tender enough, loving, gentle enough. Apprehension and bewilderment and the sense of crisis had held her from giving the whole of her heart to this one whose claim had been the very first in her consciousness.

She rose and hurried to the bedroom door and carefully, quietly she opened it. In the half-light from the open door, the little outstretched figure outlined beneath the bedclothes waked memories that tugged tenderly at her heart. So often, so often in the years that were gone, that familiar shape, defenceless, trusting, appealing, had been the last sight Tessy's eyes had had at night, the first in the morning. It was linked with so many sweet, simple happenings, it was bound up with such happy wakings, with blithe-tongued morning gossiping and eager, light-hearted planning for the day; and it was — in that old time — the curfew of Tessy Thorley's day, for till that bundled little shape lay snug and still beside her, sleep had never come to her.

She knew that to-night sleep could not come, even though the loved presence was close; they had drifted too far apart to feel that sympathism that once bound them. She had been dumb while that other's soul was an agonized harp of suffering; and to-night, she said to herself, Trix's senses were stilled, while her own were all a-cry within her. But she wanted to feel again that warm kinship, to lie close and let it penetrate the mortal coldness in her heart. Noiselessly she prepared for bed and was almost ready when there came a loud jangling of the outer door-bell. It seemed to paralyze her, for she stood as though transfixed, her hand at her throat that she might not cry out, while her heart bounded within her and all her pulses leapt with

mad delight. If he *had* come for her — if he had — if he had . . .

She heard footsteps out in the hall and the nightwatchman's voice, and then Anne Gregory's, and then — as had happened so often in the old times, when, day or night, the Settlement's comforting aid had but to be invoked — she heard a nurse walk through the hall and down the stairs, closing the outer door behind her. That was all. It had been only one of those many, many night calls for help. He had not come. How could he come, she cried to herself, how could he! And yet the finality of that closing door came like a sentence upon her. She felt her limbs tremble beneath her and silently, for she could not wake Trix from the respite of sleep, she huddled upon the floor, tearless and choking with misery.

She must not wake Trix, she repeated to herself, and all at once her mind centred upon the thought. How was it that she had not waked at that clanging peal that broke the night's silence? It had taken weeks, Tessy remembered, to accustom herself to it, and even then, unless she were tired from work, she had heard its noisy peal. Anne Gregory waked even now. Why was it Trixy did not stir?

Slowly Tessy got to her feet, but as she rose she brushed against the table standing by the bed. It swayed and she caught it, but not before a little empty vial had rolled, rattling noisily, to the uncarpeted floor. Mechanically she picked it up. Yet the sleeper did not stir.

"Trixy!" breathed Tess, half hoping to wake her, half fearing lest she should.

She turned the light on full, then hurried to the bed, laying a shaking hand on her shoulder. "Trixy — forgive

me," she stammered, bending over to touch her lips to Beatrix's cheek. "I — I'm so afraid——"

But Beatrix's cheek was moist and cold, and through her slightly-parted lashes the dilated pupils gleamed in the ironical, lidded smile of death.

At Thorley some days later Archibald Johns was waiting to see Tessa. Since Miss Gregory's summons to Michael, which Johns had answered instead, he had acted for her in all those terrible details with which tragedy complicates death, and yet their words had been the briefest and neither had mentioned the one who was constantly in the minds of both.

She came down to him presently, composed and quiet, in a gown that was like a nun's, he said to himself. No Thorley has ever worn crape; it is a family tradition that mourning is not a matter of millinery. And yet to Johns there was a significance in her attire, as well as in her bearing, that braced him to battle.

"I know you'd rather not be disturbed," he said as she gave him her hand, "but it is necessary for someone to speak to you."

"I know," she assured him gently, taking the chair he placed. "You have been so very kind. I don't know all that you have done, but I am grateful, believe me."

He nodded slowly. "That someone who is to speak to you about things you'd rather not discuss, is myself," he went on gravely. "It must be myself for a number of reasons: first, I am Michael's friend; second, I know his wife thoroughly, better perhaps than she does herself; and, third, I — care for you and you know it, so I think you will trust me."

MICHAEL THWAITES'S WIFE

She looked at him in terror, and her appealing eyes heaving breast stirred his pity and his love. He was not for an answer, but for her to grow calm.

"When are you going to leave here?" he asked.

"I don't know," she murmured.

"What are you going to do? What are your plans?" he demanded.

"Truly I don't know," she answered piteously. "I have none."

"I have," he said gently. "When you hear them you will agree with me — ultimately — that they're the only feasible plans, the only ones."

She half rose from her chair. "Oh, I beg of you," she began, "believe me, I am thankful to you and I do trust you, but there are things that one cannot stand up to even — even to ——" Her lips trembled and she was still, but her eyes implored him.

"Are you going to ruin his life?" he asked sternly.

"I have," she said slowly; "you know I have."

He looked at her perplexed. There was some change about her that was of the period when they first met, a change that seemed to set her back in the pale, untrodden atmosphere where Love had never been.

"Do you mean to say," his words came quick and direct, "that your love for him is gone?"

A faint colour flooded her face. "I mean," she answered slowly, "I think I mean that all of it is gone; that in a sense, I, too, am gone — the I that was. It's all gone. My — my sister" — she could not yet pronounce the name — "has taken something of me with her, or perhaps has reclaimed something that was her own — a disposition — a sort of madness that was peculiarly hers, never

till — till. . . . I don't believe I can explain it to you," she added piteously, "but it is so. She used to say, mocking grandfather's queer old theories, 'We're only two sides of one nature, you and I, Tess. Just you wait long enough, you'll be me all right and I'll be the good one.'" On her lips there was a faint smile at the old title, but when she spoke again her voice was grave. "Now, she is herself again—she has taken all of herself with her, and — I, too, am myself again."

There was anger and impatience in the way he turned upon her. "I don't believe you," he said impulsively.

"You don't!"

He shook his head. "If I believed you," he said passionately, "if I could believe you, do you think I'd waste a moment pleading another man's cause?"

"Oh!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands in distress, "it's all done with me — won't you understand?"

Again he shook his head.

"You don't — you don't know what I've been through," she murmured. "It's enough to kill the heart in one. I'm glad mine's dead — at last."

He took her hand in his. "Hearts don't die, you poor little girl," he said softly. "Love cannot die — and have been love. I know this. You do, too."

She withdrew her hand quickly and rose from her chair, hurrying from him. "Please forgive me," she stammered; "I can't talk."

But he followed her. "There's something I've got to show you," he insisted. "Wait — just a moment." He took a folded paper from his pocket, opened it and handed it to her.

She looked at it bewildered and then lifted appealing eyes to his.

"It's the verdict," he explained, "and the burial certificate."

"Yes," she said folding the papers. "Thank you, I will — I will look over them some other time."

He smiled. "If that was all that was necessary, would I have brought them to you and asked you to read them?" he asked, and reluctantly she seated herself again. "Shall I read it to you?"

"If — it is necessary," she said, and returned the papers to him.

Her mind wandered while he read the first document, a verdict of accidental death due to an overdose of sleeping medicine; she wondered why he should insist upon her hearing it.

"Don't you understand?" he asked. "Have you listened?"

The eyes she lifted were perplexed, uncomprehending, and he read the second paper. When he reached the name he read it and then paused and repeated it: "Therese Thorley Matthewson, aged twenty-three years, four months and —"

Then she lifted her hands to her head in terror and stared at him. "How — how could you!" she gasped. "How could you!" She seized the papers and glanced through them. "It seems," she moaned hysterically, "it seems I am dead and buried. Oh — oh, I wish — I were!"

He caught her hands as she wrung them wildly. "No," he cried, "Mrs. Thwaites's sister — her weary, dear little sister, is dead and buried. That is all done now, as you and Michael thought it was months ago. But Michael's wife, Michael's true, loving, devoted wife, the wife of his heart, the wife he so terribly needs is alive and brave — brave enough to do her duty and — atone."

She shook her head in bitter negation. "There — there must be some contagion in deceit like mine that an honourable man should do such a thing," she stammered, and the tears rolled down her cheeks. "Oh, be warned by me; people are terribly punished for doing such things!"

He listened pityingly. "I did not do it; I let it be done," he said. "Miss Gregory did it, in all innocence. I sanctioned it, guiltily, if you will, but I would not change it."

Her breast was heaving and her hands fluttered to her throat. "It is you that have hurt him now!" she cried. "How will it be — what can we do now? Oh, I am sick of it — heartsick — heartsick! Why did you do it — why did you?"

"I think," he said slowly, "I did it mainly to deprive you of the whip which I knew you'd use to flagellate your soul. There is no limit, evidently, to a good woman's capacity for self-sacrifice; she'll torture herself, though to accomplish it she must plunge everybody who loves her into despair."

She glanced up at him fearfully, inquiringly, and then looked determinedly away. She started to her feet and hurried from him, only to return stumbling and wringing her hands, to where he waited.

"See," she cried, "how terribly complex you've made my life — and his!"

He smiled sadly. "I see only how beautifully simple everything is for you two." There was sorrow in his voice, a noble sorrow that thrilled her; she put out a hand to him, her eyes soft and sorrowing, too. He took her hand and held it. "Dear love, that's not for me," he said quietly, "I've got something to tell you. I've got to hurt you — it hurts me to think of it."

"Not — Michael?" she sobbed.

He nodded. "You know we told you he could not come to you in all this trouble, because——"

"Yes, because he was not very well," she put in quickly, as though defying him.

He smiled again. "No sudden illness would have been strong enough to keep Michael Thwaites from you; he's — be brave, child — he's blind, quite blind."

She wandered about the house after he had gone; in every room she sought something she could not name and could not find. She hurried to and fro as though the time were short; time which, an hour ago, had seemed to stretch ahead of her, an unendurable eternity. Through the nursery and down the stairs, through the rooms the boy Michael had occupied, along the stairway where first she had seen him, through the still, big room where her young head and Peter Thorley's had lain side by side that last night he lived and loved her; and then, searching over the same ground, hoping to find the second time what she had missed the first. But it eluded her and, panting, agitated, yet with the fixed idea of finding it, she slipped out of doors. The sun was going down over the sharp ridge of the mountain, its last rays streaming with a crashing blaze of glory over the frost-touched forest; the snow had melted, being too light to last, and over all, clear-washed sky and sparkling leaves and moist earth, there was the shining fragrance of the sun after storm.

She looked and threw out her arms in passionate, re-awakened worship; and then, deliberately, she closed her eyes and stood and faced it all unseeing. The tears rolled down her cheeks and her bosom rose and fell, but still she

stood with lids drawn close, shutting out all that radiant, sweet, sharp riot of form and colour.

She knew when it was done by the cold shadow that fell when the sun went down. Then she hurried to the little burial place where, since Colonel Thorley's time, one after the other of his family had been laid. She found the new mound and sat beside it.

"See, Trix," she said quietly, as though her words were heard, "here we are, he and I, at the end of things, both with spoiled lives, he blind and I lost (having neither my old self nor yours to clothe me with) both with nothing to live for but each other. Wait — wait, dear," she added quickly as at an interruption; "I know what you said that night you came back. I remember — 'You can't be bad and selfish without hurting somebody, and God manages it so that the one you hurt is the one you'd willingly be crucified for — only your love crucifies him instead.' That's what I have done to Michael. I kissed his poor eyes closed that night, but really I blinded him as truly as though I'd driven a knife into them. And then I left him, left him alone there. Think of that, Trix, think of that! Where am I going to find peace after that? Tell me — for it is you, as well as I, that have wrecked him. It is the two of us together — the whole of us, perhaps, but you, honestly and cruelly, and I, trickily and most cruelly. And for my sacrifice of him, I got nothing — not even the comfort of saving you, dear. Oh, what a futile fool I am! Laugh at me, Trixy, with your pale, quiet lips, I am so tragically ridiculous!" She beat her breast in passionate despair and lifted an anguished, accusing face. "And you, too, Trixy — am I the cause? Am I the cause of that, too? Did you throw your poor life away because of —"

him and me? Did you — honey — did you?" She spent her low entreaty and waited for awhile in sad silence. "For if you did, my darling," she added slowly, as at length she rose, "I'm going — to take what you gave me. And if — if God is merciful and you did n't, I'm going anyway. And the test of it, the answer you won't give, my Trixy, our life will give, his and mine."

When she caught sight of him he was seated in the low chair where she had left him, but there was strength yet in the posture, she thrilled to see, though his head was lowered and his eyes bent in abstraction.

She prayed that she might be close to him before he should become aware of her presence, that all could be said at once with hands in hands and lips on lips, and with her arms about him to help her, to interpret. But already a keenness of hearing had come to him; his head lifted peremptorily and his eyes, unchanged, yet oddly changed, too, as to dulled jet, turned upon her.

"Who is it?" he asked, and the note of enforced patience in that voice, of repression, of determined enduring, broke away all the barriers she had set between composure and the pitying love that tugged at her heart; she forgot all she had to say, to excuse, to implore; she remembered only his name, and she cried that out with a broken-voiced passion that seemed to tear her throat. And then she was kneeling before him, her arms about his bowed head, her lips caressing his stricken eyes, her voice murmuring brokenly, as a mother's who sobs over her hurt child.

"I — can't see," he stammered. "I can't see you! Oh, God, to see you just this once more!"

The agitation in his voice quieted her. "Hush, my

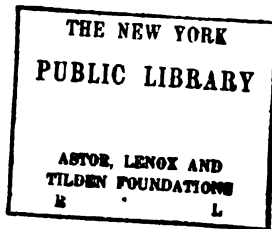
love, hush!" she said softly. "If — if your eyes could see I would be afraid to meet them; they would seem to be searching my heart for the cunning, the cheating guile that made its home there; they would seem to be always demanding of me how ever I could hope to be forgiven, to be believed again, to be trusted. And, oh, I can't live without your faith in me — Michael, I can't! Give it to me again, fully, completely as before — before I blinded you!"

He put his hand over her lips that were trembling now with the last words she had faltered. "I'll not be able to see what you're thinking," he said slowly, "but if ever you think that — remember, sweetheart, if ever you think that, you must leave me again and never come back. We can't live with that false thing between us."

"Michael!" she cried, clinging to him.

He laughed, and the world grew light and livable to her at that low laugh of content. "We've struck a bargain, Joy," he said softly. "I need n't name it — but it's there." His arm closed about her and he drew her to him. "Thank God for blindness, my wife! It has given you back to me."

THE END







Entenning

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